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## Chapter Two

### Learning in Three Languages in Home and Community

*Raymonde Sneddon*

#### *Introducing Rehana*

'Well, it depends, sometimes I say *hathi* and sometimes I say *elephant*, because it came first into my head'.

Rehana is retelling the story of the Raja's Big Ears (Desai, 1989) in Gujarati. She is just a little nervous of the tape-recorder at first and mutters a couple of times under her breath 'how do you say...?' Then she gets in to the flow: the story takes off, the dialogue is lively and the chants come in both English and Gujarati:

*The raja's got big ears!*

*The raja's got big ears!*

*Who told you?*

*Who told you?*

In the same way as story tellers of that age drive their stories along in English with *and then, and then*, Rehana links her narrative with *pachi, pachi*. A number of English words come into her story, as they came first into her head: *musical instruments, party, table, tambourine, secret*.

Rehana is eleven and was born in London. Her Gujarati has features of the Surti dialect that her family speak. She makes some mistakes: gender is a minefield for bilingual children who have become dominant in English, and Gujarati has three. In the language of the story there are some words that are unfamiliar in both her main languages, like *barber* (*hajam* in Gujarati): '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 *hairstylist*'.

'My Dad doesn't like us to speak English at home. He tells us off'. Both Rehana's parents were born and educated to secondary school level in India in Gujarati, Urdu, Hindi and English and they have literacy skills, in varying degrees, in all these languages. They are keen to pass on Gujarati, the main language of the family. Rehana learned English when she went to nursery. As well as hearing her read in English every day when she was younger, as the school recommended, Rehana's mother told her stories in Gujarati. Her father is heavily involved in the running of a centre that caters for the needs of the Gujarati and Urdu speaking community, so there are lots of documents in Gujarati and Urdu around the house and both languages are used regularly for reading and writing.

As a Muslim, Rehana goes to school very near home and attends the Madressa (religious classes attached to the mosque) in a large converted Victorian house in the same street. There are many opportunities for her to use Gujarati as well as English in most areas of her life: there are Gujarati children in her class at school, she attends a playcentre where all children are Gujarati/English bilinguals, she goes swimming regularly with her friends, many of whom are also Gujarati speakers. She uses all these opportunities, though how much Gujarati she speaks depends on the context. At school and at the swimming pool she speaks a little Gujarati with her friends. At playcentre, she switches from Gujarati to English depending on what she is doing and who she is with, but the balance there is more towards English. However, playing with friends at home she speaks Gujarati more than half the time and switches back and forward from one language to the other. At the Madressa she speaks mostly Gujarati to her friends and to her teacher, who is more confident in Gujarati than English, although this is mixed with words and phrases in English. She is learning Urdu at Madressa and speaks it a little at home. Her mother helps her every day with reading her religious books in Urdu.

Although her parents resolutely speak to her in Gujarati, like many bilingual children, she answers half of the time in English, in spite of Dad's telling off. She is a very fluent speaker of English, in which she can tell a wonderfully expressive version of the Raja's big ears, and she has achieved Level four in English (the level expected of monolingual English speaking children) and Level five (a higher than expected level) in maths in her Key Stage Two SATs, the tests for children in England at the end of primary school.

### ***Introduction and context***

Rehana's story is one of 36 that I explored as part of a study of children who live their daily lives in three languages in a Gujarati Muslim community in north east London. The children were aged three and a half to eleven. Through interviews, observations, recordings and questionnaires, their experiences of learning literacy in Gujarati, Urdu and English were explored in school, in the home and in community classes. The children's use of their three languages was tracked through the three generations of their families and in many different areas of their daily lives in the community.

I originally encountered the community through my work as a teacher in a multilingual primary school in which they formed the largest language group. As a new teacher in the late 1970s with a background in linguistics, I became very interested in the many languages spoken at home by the children in my school. While the main focus of my work was to teach English as an additional language, my own experiences as a bilingual led me to build the use of children's home languages into the everyday life of the school. I was greatly supported and encouraged in this by the staff at the Inner London Education Authority's (ILEA) Centre for Urban Educational Studies and colleagues on the Language in the

Multicultural Primary Classroom Project based at the Institute of Education in London.

Over the next few years, parents and older siblings had a major linguistic input into the school. Initially they came in to the classroom to look at their own children's work, to write captions for photos, and text in the family language for a child's book. Some came to tell stories in home languages, initially to groups, then to the whole class; they made story tapes and story posters, they made bilingual books with their own children about personal experiences, and made games that encouraged children to share their languages with each other. Parents and children helped us pilot multiscript word processing software that was being developed specifically for use by pupils and teachers in London schools (Sneddon, 1998). A group of mothers went together to a multilingual bookshop to choose books for the school library.

Children told me about the community classes that they attended and I was invited to visit Saturday schools in which they learned Punjabi, Turkish and Bengali. The ILEA Mother Tongue teaching service were persuaded to provide a part time teacher of Gujerati, the language with the largest number of speakers in the school, to teach all children who wished to attend, in school time. We set up a Saturday Bengali school on school premises, managed by the parents, who had requested it for their children.

As a teacher at a time when primary French was still being taught and knowledge of European languages was valued, I was aware of the very different status accorded to the bilingualism of the children I taught. While some of my colleagues were positive about encouraging children to use their first languages and impressed with their knowledge and skills, others worried that maintaining these languages would confuse children like Rehana and damage their educational opportunities. When I started investigating research on bilingualism, I found these contradictory attitudes reflected in the literature reviewed by

Hamers and Blanc (1989) and Baker (2001). The theoretical model developed by Cummins (1984) addressed these issues and offered explanations for apparently contradictory research results. The Common Underlying Proficiency (Cummins, 1984) suggests that concepts and skills developed in one language transfer readily to another. The circumstances in which children learn two or more languages can significantly affect whether or not they develop as *additive bilinguals*: adding a second language to their first and becoming confident users of two languages in a wide range of situations, or as *subtractive bilinguals*: losing the use of their first language as they acquire their second.

According to the model, which type of bilingual the children become depends on whether they have acquired a strong level of concept development and proficiency in their first language when they encounter their second. Children who have access to education in their first language acquire their second language with greater ease and proficiency. Studies with balanced bilinguals (Peal and Lambert, 1962) and evaluations of bilingual education programmes have shown the intellectual benefits derived from additive bilingualism (Thomas and Collier, 1997; Cummins, 1996).

Bilingual education is not on offer in the mainstream system for speakers of community languages in England and the little value put on skills in these languages suggested that the children in my school were likely to become subtractive bilinguals. Cummins' empowerment model (2001) provided the rationale for valuing community languages within the school, encouraging attendance at mother tongue schools (as we called them then), and providing first language teaching on the premises whenever possible.

Common patterns of European bilingualism (such as my own, in French and English) fit in very nicely with the Cummins model: if children speak two standard European languages and have opportunities for education in the language they speak in the home (give or take some differences in regional and

social dialects); they are very likely to become additive bilinguals speaking languages that have high status in the wider community. By contrast, in multilingual countries the world over, many people speak languages that are not written or not available in education. Different languages are generally used for different purposes and it is a common experience for children to be educated in a language or language variety that is very different from the one that is spoken in their home.

When I set out to study language use and literacy practices in the Gujarati community, the Cummins' model was at the heart of my hypotheses. I was looking for evidence of what impact support in the language and literacy of the home might have on children's lives and, eventually, on their achievement in school.

The reality of what I found proved to be far more complex than I had anticipated, as the following will demonstrate.

### *Language and Literacy in Multilingual Families*

The study described here focused on a three generation community of Gujarati speaking Indian Muslims who started settling in north east London in the late 1960s. They came from the district of Surat in Gujerat, many of them from the same village, Bardoli. Ties of kinship and friendship are strong and the community have remained close. They come from primarily rural backgrounds and have a lower socio-economic profile than Gujarati communities in the west of London (Linguistic Minorities Project, 1985; Dave, 1991), who are primarily Hindus with professional backgrounds, many of whom came to London via Kenya. Elders of the community described the economic and social challenges which they experienced on arrival. In the face of racism and discrimination, the community organised itself. At the present time a mosque and community centre

occupying three large adjacent houses are witness to the community's concern to provide facilities for their members. As practising Muslims, the families wanted their children to attend daily religious instruction after school in the Madressa which is part of the mosque. Many live within walking distance of the mosque. The community centre, founded in 1980, famously provides cradle-to-grave services for the whole community including classes, youth and sports activities and a crèche. Local knowledge suggested to me that this community centre played an important part in children's lives.

The community which I studied speak a dialect of Gujarati. Those who have been educated in India, like Rehana's parents, were educated in the standard variety and were also literate in Urdu and other languages such as Hindi or Arabic. Urdu is the more prestigious language used by Muslims in India: it is the language of power, of literature and of the quality press. It has much greater status than the regional language of Gujarati. Crucially it is the language of religious instruction, through which the Qur'an is interpreted. While Gujarati has great affective value in relation to personal identity, the use of Urdu is culturally very important to the community although it is little used as a regular means of communication within the family. In all families studied varying proportions of Gujarati and of English were used.

### *Learning to be literate in home and community*

Lengthy interviews with parents and children, informal discussions and observations, visits to homes and schools helped to build up a picture of the experiences of literacy that children had in their everyday environment. Of the 36 children involved in the study, twelve were aged three and a half and just starting at nursery, twelve were aged seven and twelve aged eleven, with equal numbers of boys and girls. The study was built on a matched pair design with



half of the children belonging to families who made use of a community centre and half who did not.

At the time of the research (which started in 1996), there were few opportunities for children to use their first language in mainstream school. The Gujarati classes, which had run in two of the seven primary schools involved in the research, had long ceased. When the ILEA was abolished in 1990 and individual London boroughs took over responsibility for education, most of the teachers in the Mother Tongue team were redeployed as teachers of English as an additional language and many of their community language classes closed. A similar fate befell regular storytelling in these languages. The eurocentric and overloaded National Curriculum of 1988 made no mention of community languages and most teachers felt there was no time in the school day to move beyond its very prescriptive programme.

Of the 36 children in the study, only one had the opportunity to speak in Gujarati to an adult in school, and that was because her auntie was a dinner lady. Most of the schools had a small collection of books in community languages, mainly dual-language story books and some of these were sent home for parents to read with their children.

### *Children's literacy experiences in the home*

The extent of multiliteracy and the resources encountered by children in the home varied from family to family. The literacy background of parents, the different ways in which the languages of the community were used and the availability of literacy resources, all of these had an influence on the children's experience of multiliteracy in the home.

About half the parents in the study, like Rehana's, had been educated in India in three languages or more and took multiliteracy completely for granted. This was reflected in the literacy materials in the home, which were primarily in four languages: English, Urdu, Gujarati and Arabic. All families had copies of the Qur'an and some had other religious texts in Arabic. Most families had religious books in Urdu for adults and all had religious books for children in that language, most of which were obtained through the local Madressa. A majority of families had books for adults and some for children in Gujarati. Many had magazines and newspapers in Gujarati and some in Urdu. All children would have been familiar with the different scripts used for Arabic and Urdu (written from right to left and very similar) Gujarati and English (both left to right).

While common religious books could be obtained from the Madressa, a problem for many families was the difficulty of obtaining reading material, especially for children. Friends and relatives travelling to Gujarat were often asked to bring back books. A couple of families bought books in Gujarati by mail order from a company in Leicester, a city in central England with the largest Gujarati speaking population in the country. The literacy materials in these multilingual homes were similar in many respects to those described in studies by Saxena (1994) in a multilingual community in Southall, by Bhatt (1994) in Leicester, Gregory *et al* (1993) in Tower Hamlets and Kenner (2000b) in London: resources in different languages were used in different areas of children's lives.

Gujarati was the main language used for story telling, which was a common experience for children, especially the younger ones, in most homes: stories were traditional ones, but a lot of story telling was spontaneous and related to life in Gujarat, family 'back home', what happened during the day and significant family events. The shortage of children's books in Gujarati meant that reading to children in that language was a lot less common. Several parents indicated that they appreciated when the school sent home dual language books in Gujarati.

While some parents reported story telling in Urdu, that language was primarily used for reading and discussing stories related to the children's religious and moral education, from books obtained from the Madressa. When children were old enough to attend religious instructions, at around ages six or seven, this practice became a priority and, in some families like Rehana's, a daily event. While mothers played the lead rôle in story telling and reading, in most families, as Gregory found (1998), fathers, grandparents and siblings were also involved. The extent to which different family members were involved in different activities reflected their literacy expertise and family priorities for the children's language development.

Letter writing to relatives in Gujerat was a common activity in many families, children had homework from school in English and from the Madressa in Urdu. Children participated in these activities and there were a number of examples of eleven year old children helping their parents with business correspondence in English. Other examples included a family who taught their children maths in Gujerati and another whose close relative was an Urdu poet.

The research project showed most families supporting their children to develop literacy in English in the manner recommended by the school. The parents of younger children read story books to them, especially the ones sent home from school. The parents of children aged seven also provided a great deal of support in both hearing children read regularly and reading to them. There was a tendency for parents to focus these activities on the children who were performing less well in school; good readers aged seven were encouraged to read by themselves. Children aged eleven at the time of the research project reported reading with their parents regularly when they were younger.

### *Children's literacy experiences in the community*

The literacy experiences of children in their families showed three languages being used in different ways in children's every day lives. Gujarati was the most influential language when the children were very young and Urdu became more significant in their lives as religious education became more important. English literacy was encouraged and supported in most families from nursery through to age eleven.

The Cummins model of bilingual development suggests that becoming literate in Gujarati, the first language of the children and the one most used, alongside English, in their homes, would enable children to derive the intellectual benefits of additive bilingualism and perform at a higher level than monolinguals in English. When embarking on this research project, I had wondered whether, in the absence of any form of bilingual education in school, parental and community support for the language of the home would be sufficient to have some impact on children's academic achievement in English. The model did not fit and the reality proved to be much more complex.

There were no Gujarati classes for the children to go to in the neighbourhood since the classes in the mainstream schools, mentioned above, had ceased. While there were a few classes for adults, the community prioritised the learning of Urdu for the children's religious education. Two children were taught to read and write Gujarati at home by their parents, and were the only ones who could properly do so. Some others were taught a little basic literacy at home from primers imported from India. It was very clear from statements made about the affective value of the language, that families wanted their children to learn it and be literate in it, however they were also realistic about the burden of study on their children. Two families in the study mentioned the classes that had once taken place in the mainstream school and several indicated that they would have liked Gujarati to be taught as part of the mainstream curriculum.

All the children in the sample aged seven and eleven attended Madressa on five nights a week for their religious education which took place through the medium of Urdu. The following quotation, from a text used at the Madressa, spells out the essential religious knowledge and understanding expected of Muslims.

Muslims must recite the Qur'an in Arabic and learn its meaning in their own language (Basic Principles of Islam: 15).

From a religious point of view it would be perfectly acceptable for the children to be instructed through the medium of Gujarati or English, but the status of Urdu and traditions in the community ensured that learning Urdu alongside learning to recite the Qur'an in Arabic remained a priority.

The following is an example of a text used to support children's study of the Qur'an. The lines of text in the larger print are written in Arabic. The Urdu translation in smaller print is followed by the English version. Pupils learn the Arabic by heart.

## DU'AA WHILST MAKING WUDHU

9

وضو کرتے وقت کی دُعا

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي ذَنْبِي وَوَسِّعْ لِي فِي دَارِي

وَبَارِكْ لِي فِي رِزْقِي

یا اللہ میرے گناہوں کو معاف کر دے اور میرے گھر میں وسعت دے  
اور میرے رزق میں برکت عطا فرما

O Allah! forgive my sins and give expansion ( Abundance )  
in my home and grant me blessings in my sustenance.

## DU'AA TO BE RECITED AFTER WUDHU

کلمہ شہادت پڑھے  
RECITE KALIMA SHAHADAT.

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

گواہی دیتا ہوں میں کہ اللہ کے سوا کوئی معبود نہیں  
اور گواہی دیتا ہوں میں کہ محمد (صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم) اللہ تعالیٰ کے بندے اور اس کے رسول ہیں

I testify that there is none worthy of worship but  
Allah, and I testify that Muhammed ( Sallallohu -  
Ataihe-Wa-Sallam ) is Allah's worshipper and messenger.

● ALSO RECITE SURAH QADR  
(" INNA ANZALNAAH ")

Figure One: Page from a text in Arabic, Urdu and English

(Basic Essentials for Muslims)

For the children who featured in this study, understanding text was a complex negotiated affair. All the children spoke English, all spoke Gujarati in family and community with varying levels of fluency, all could recite sections of the Qur'an, in Arabic, by heart. The texts that support religious and moral education are written in Urdu. Books used are graded for difficulty and one of the first tasks of the children is to learn to read in Urdu from primers.

In the Urdu classes which I was invited to observe, most of the seven year olds in my study were learning to decode basic Urdu texts: sound-to-symbol correspondence is more regular in Urdu than in English and children were learning sounds, 'words that begin with ...', assembling words, decoding, filling in gaps and answering simple questions in writing. The primers used were

carefully graded and illustrations were only used in the earliest books. The language of instruction depended very much on the preferred language of the teacher, but was also influenced by the language with which the children were most familiar. Explanations were in Urdu, in Gujarati or in English and the children's responses were also in all of these languages, although not necessarily in a reciprocal manner. In a group of younger children observed, the teacher was a newcomer from Gujarat and the children were using a lot of Gujarati, not only to the teacher, but among themselves, like Rehana reported doing. A group of older children, working with a young, British born and educated and fully multilingual teacher, were inclined to use much more English. In conversations with the teacher and, to a much greater extent among themselves, the children were codeswitching.

The ultimate aim was for the children to read the religious texts with understanding and this was achieved through a complex negotiation of three languages. At ages seven, eight and nine, children were introduced to new Urdu vocabulary through learning words in the context of phrases and sentences and looking them up in dictionaries. Teachers, within the limits of their own linguistic skills, would translate and explain in Gujarati or English. Some children pencilled in notes in English in the margins of their text books.

The older children, aged eleven and above were expected to learn to read the Urdu texts with understanding. Children observed read in a round and were questioned about the meaning of the text in Urdu. Responses were expected in Urdu, although they were also offered in Gujarati or English. As with many traditional school comprehension exercises, it would have been possible to answer some of the questions by repeating a sentence from the text: a correct answer would not necessarily have indicated understanding. A young teacher, London born and trained in an Islamic boarding school in Bradford, whom I observed teaching a group of the older girls, explained that, when this occurred, she would accept an answer to the question in English. She explained that the children's spoken Urdu

was not good enough to discuss the text in any depth and that she could best ensure understanding by asking for paraphrases, explanations or discussion of aspects of character and motivation from the text in English. She would also sometimes ask a very general and open ended question in English which required, to answer it, a thorough understanding of an entire section of the Urdu text.

Observation of children at age seven revealed a very wide spread of skills. Some children had learned to decode Urdu text fairly rapidly and one girl was observed translating a simple text confidently from Urdu to English. Others were struggling with the phonics and the simple process of decoding the print. Yet others were decoding fluently but frequently stopping to ask for the meaning of words. In many cases the answer was offered in English, or in Gujarati.

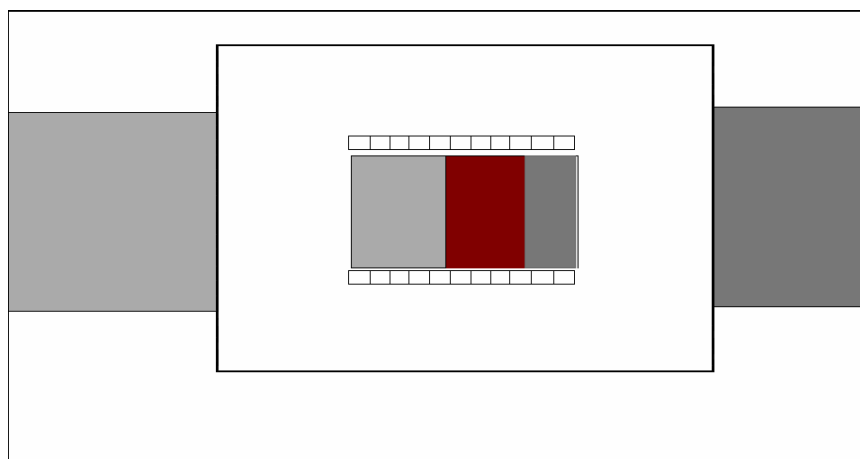
By age eleven the children were generally reading for meaning and able to engage in the text level work described above. At all these stages the children were negotiating meaning in at least two languages at any given time. An able student at the end of the course of study could read basic Urdu with understanding, but few acquired writing composition skills as this was not part of the syllabus taught. For most of the children, Urdu was a language reserved for religious and literary domains. The older children reported to me that, although they may be able to read Urdu with understanding in the context of religious instruction, the vocabulary and style of writing learned tended to restrict their knowledge to that domain. Only those children who regularly used the language for communication in the home had access to a wider repertoire in Urdu literacy. It is generally from this latter group that pupils proceed to study Urdu at GCSE and A level (General Certificate of Secondary Education subject specific exams generally taken in the fifth and seventh year of secondary school study) where this is on offer in their secondary school.

### *Language maintenance and shift*



The most interesting part of the investigation for me was working with the children aged seven and eleven to find out what language they used to whom, where and when. I asked many questions: about parents, grandparents, siblings, extended family, friends in different locations, in school, community class, playcentres etc. as well as choice of language in a range of media and for different topics of conversation. Like most bi- and multilinguals, the children used their languages very naturally in different contexts, without generally being aware of what they spoke when or whether or not they were mixing and switching.

The language survey required participants, both adults and children, to make a percentage estimate of how much of each language they would use in conversation to a particular individual or in a specific situation. The questions provoked a tremendous amount of excited debate among the children. A little box with movable cardboard slides in different colours was designed to help the children estimate how much of each of their three languages they spoke in any given situation. There were three colours on the box: the base of the box and the two slides that could be pushed in through the frame from either side. The children could choose which coloured slide to use for which language and move the slides across to estimate how much of each language they used. The researcher then noted a figure by using the (unnumbered) scale at the side. For example, a child might record that she spoke 70% Gujarati, 25% English and 5% Urdu to her father. As the children manipulated the slides, they thought deeply about their answers and some spontaneously started using percentages. 'I speak about half and half English and Gujarati to my Mum', reported seven year old Nasima, using the box, 'so that's 50% each. But I talk mostly Gujarati and some Urdu with my Nan, that's about 10% Urdu and 10% English and the rest is Gujarati.' So pleased were some of the eleven year olds with this investigation that they asked to borrow the slide box to carry out their own language use study with their many bilingual classmates.



**Figure Two: The three language box (developed by P. Sneddon for this project, 1995)**

All the children in the sample were functionally bilingual. When talking in school, in certain community situations and to adults within the family they generally had to respect appropriate norms of language choice: 'it is more polite to speak in Gujarati to grandparents', 'Dad will be cross if I speak in English', 'Mum speaks more in English', etc. It was considered that it was in communication with siblings with a similar range that the children had the greatest freedom of language choice. Therefore language choice with their siblings was used as a measure of the linguistic vitality of Gujarati in the children's language use (Giles, *et al* 1977).

While there is huge individual variation in children's language use, a broad pattern emerged which confirmed the three-generation model of language shift described by Fishman (1989). Gujarati, English and some Urdu were used in the home. All children reported using mainly Gujarati to their grandparents and they spoke more Gujarati than English to their parents. While they spoke more English than Gujarati to their siblings, they still spoke a very substantial amount of Gujarati in the home environment. The older the children, the more English they spoke to their siblings and at all ages, girls used more Gujarati than boys.

The most significant finding of the whole study related to the impact that opportunities to mix socially with other Gujarati speaking children had on the vitality of the language. An investigation of the children's social networks revealed that those who used the community centre and, in particular, the playcentres it organised in school holidays run by Gujarati speaking staff, were far more likely to maintain the use of the language. At age seven, those who used the community centre spoke twice as much Gujarati to their siblings as those who did not. By the age of eleven, centre users spoke Gujarati over a third of the time among themselves, whereas non-users of the centre hardly spoke it at all (Sneddon, 2000b).

Observations at the playcentre showed children switching languages according to context as well as tactically: the girls in the 'beauty parlour' putting cucumber slices and tea-bags on their faces spoke to each other in English; when they moved to the corner where they painted Mehendi patterns with henna on their hands, they spoke Gujarati; the boys at cricket practice were shouting to each other in English, but when they played against an English team, they switched to Gujarati.

### *Language skills and story telling*

Children's oral skills in both English and Gujarati were evaluated in the project through asking them to retell stories. These had been given to them to read with their parents in the home when Sakina Hafesji, a Gujarati speaking research assistant, and I visited. The stories used were *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1992) with the youngest children, *The Naughty Mouse* (Stone and Desai, 1989) for the children aged 7 and *The Raja's Big Ears* (Desai, 1989) for the older children, all in Gujarati/English versions.

The children varied greatly in their responses to the task, though all but one very shy three and a half year old enjoyed the opportunity to record their stories. In a nursery class, Amina was shy with me, but told the story to Sakina in Gujarati. Another nursery teacher had warned me that Omar had not yet spoken in any language in class. However he had met me in his home, he loved the book I had given him and it was from him that Sakina and I got the most wonderfully expressive retelling of *The Hungry Caterpillar* story in both languages.

It was apparent from their recorded narratives that, at age seven, the children's English language skills were still developing. A few children had difficulties with vocabulary that appeared to be unfamiliar in English. In one less fluent speaker's story 'soldiers' became 'toldiers' and 'shoulers' and 'palace' became 'place'. The recounts varied from a simple action based narrative focused around illustrations in the book to a lively retelling with whole passages of expressive and dramatic dialogue. In some instances, where the dialogue revealed developing English skills, the meaning could be slightly unclear '*but he be angry and he was angry still to make me a cap*' but in most cases it did not interfere with pace or meaning: '*I don't sell for the mice, I don't make for mice cloth!*'. Interestingly, the best story tellers who were most at home with the academic 'book language' of the stories were also the ones who included the colloquial Cockney influenced east London English of schoolchildren (*he done it quick, but he never*) in their tales. Some dramatic narratives were also told in Gujarati, with children code-switching at times into English as they struggled with some of the more literary phrases in standard Gujarati which were unfamiliar to them as dialect speakers. This was particularly noticeable with the repetitive chants in the story which some children found easier to recall closely in English:

I'll come in the night with my soldiers as well,  
we'll bite your ears till you squeak, screech and yell

The children by age eleven had achieved good levels of competence in both languages with some distinctive features. Retellings included non-standard colloquial English (*he wouldn't tell no one*) and some features associated with speakers of English as an additional language (*he was burst to tell*); in Gujarati, the children made the story very much their own, the most lively and creative story tellers being most likely to use dialect and reinterpret the formal language in their own way, making some grammatical errors in the process. As well as codeswitching into English, they sometimes used the same word in both languages, like Rehana did, or created a word such as *baal kapnawalo* (literally *haircutter*) in place of the unfamiliar word for barber, *hajam* (Sneddon and Patel, 2003).

The children's experience of listening to stories told and read and discussed at school, at home and in the Urdu class, was very apparent in the way that many of them structured their tales. Of particular significance was the relationship between the length, structure and depth of stories in both languages: good story tellers in English were also good story tellers in Gujarati. This suggests a transfer of skills operating through the rich and complex pattern of experience of oral and written story in the children's lives.

### *Discussion*

As a teacher exploring the experiences of children in their homes and communities, I learned a very great deal about the complex negotiations of language that went on in children's homes, in the wider community and in school.

In line with Cummins' concept of the Common Underlying Proficiency, and research findings on the benefits of bilingual education, I was looking for quantitative evidence that the support children were receiving in the home and the

community for Gujarati would have a positive effect on their achievement in English. I did not find this. There was no statistically significant relationship between support for Gujarati and achievement in English. There were no Gujarati classes and the support children received from their families remained primarily oral and, while quite substantial in some cases, was still considerably less than the support given for literacy in English. Urdu, although not regularly used for communication in the home, was the language which all children learned to read as soon as they attended Madressa. However no measures of Urdu achievement were available to me to relate to achievement in English. As mentioned in the introduction, the reality of children's experience was complex. Findings from bilingual programmes in which children became literate in the language of the home did not really apply here.

What I did find, however, in relation to achievement in English was even more complex, and interesting. At age three and a half there was no clear overall relationship between support for literacy in the home and scores on a Knowledge About Print test. At age seven, gender effects were strong: the evidence of the story recordings showed that the children were generally competent in communicative English, but were still developing as learners of 'book English' (Cummins, 1984). In spite of this, five out of the six girls achieved at the expected Level two for reading on the Key Stage One tests (the expected level for monolingual English pupils in a test taken at age seven).

By age eleven, the evidence of the recordings showed children comfortable with the academic language of books and performing on the London Reading Test, a test of reading comprehension (The London Reading Test, 1992) at a level higher than monolingual pupils of similar social backgrounds. Where the mean for monolingual children in the borough at the time was 100.3, the Gujarati boys scored 106 and the girls 104.5. While this finding does not reach statistical significance, it still demonstrates that the children's considerable achievements in language and literacy knowledge in Gujarati and Urdu have not compromised

their achievement in English at the point where they left primary school. Of particular interest is the very unusual finding that the boys' achievement in reading comprehension is ahead of the girls'. As almost all children in the community attend the classes, this may reflect the particularly high status placed in their community on religious knowledge for boys acquired through a close study of texts and complex negotiations of meaning.

Discussions with parents and exploration of the literacy experiences of the home revealed families who had generally good relations with their children's school. A number reported attending literacy evenings and being given advice on how to support their children at home. They read books sent home from school to the younger children and heard the older children read. Parents tended to focus their energies on children who fell behind with reading. There was a statistically significant relationship in my data between support with reading at home in English and achievement in reading comprehension at age eleven (Sneddon, 2000b). Literacy practices recommended by the school were increasingly penetrating homes in the area. Teachers in the schools that the children attended were generally positive about the children's bilingualism, however, as Gregory and Williams (2000) and Bourne (2001) have pointed out, there is often little knowledge in school about the language learning and literacy practices of the home, or of what children learn in community classes. The good relations between school and families operated very much in one direction.

### ***Conclusion***

The settings in which children learn outside vary greatly from community to community and are hard to categorise. Neither 'supplementary school', nor 'complementary school', nor 'mother tongue' nor 'religious school' quite fit the community setting in which the Gujarati Muslim children are learning. While the purpose of their studies is clearly religious, the focus on learning Urdu gives the

classes a strong linguistic dimension. The learning at these classes is a great source of pride for the children and their skills form an important part of their personal identities. The pedagogy makes full use of the children's varied linguistic repertoires and operates very differently from the pedagogy of mainstream school. It is not the purpose of these daily classes to support the learning that happens in mainstream school, as is the case in many other forms of complementary education, and the children perceive them as quite separate.

These two areas of learning and the different pedagogies that children experienced every day were very separate in their lives. While most schools are now aware of the languages that children speak there is still little use made of their linguistic and literacy knowledge and the complex metalinguistic skills they have learned through exploring meaning through a range of languages in community settings. The parents of the children were not generally highly educated, but, taking their grandparents and siblings into account, each family had someone who could read with the children in English and help a little with homework in English, someone who told stories in Gujarati, someone who helped them to learn the Qur'an and read and talked to them about the Urdu texts they brought home from Madressa. It is the children's homes that provide a synthesis: it is there that parents, keen for their children to be successful in school, anxious that they should not lose the ability to speak to their grandparents and wishing them to grow up as good Muslims in the Gujarati tradition, bring the learning together according to family priorities and in whatever language they are most comfortable with for the task in hand. Rehana's parents provided a good example of a family successfully providing support for their daughter in ways that mattered for her future as a British Gujarati Muslim.

In the course of the research project my discussions with children revealed the considerable interest they had in talking about their language and literacy experiences. A closer collaboration between mainstream schools, complementary schools and families would support the children in building on their language



skills, their metalinguistic knowledge, their ability to respond to different learning situations and styles and encourage their development as additive bilinguals.