



CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

53rd Foundation Day Lecture Series

Lecture 27

Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 3:00 pm IST

Dialect and Standard in Gujarati: some neglected historical connections and puzzles



Rajend Mesthrie

Rajend Mesthrie is Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at the University of Cape Town where he teaches Sociolinguistics, including language contact and variation. He was head of the Linguistics Section (1998 – 2009), and currently holds an NRF research chair in migration, language, and social change. He was President of the Linguistics Society of Southern Africa (2002-2009) and President of the International Congress of Linguists (2013-2018). He is a past co-editor of *English Today* (2008-2012). Amongst his book publications are *Language in Indenture: a Sociolinguistic history of Bhojpuri-Hindi in South Africa* (Routledge 1992, reprint ed. 2019), *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (with Swann, Deumert & Leap, Edinburgh University Press 2009), *Language in South Africa* (ed., CUP 2002) and *A Dictionary of South African Indian English* (UCT Press, 2010).

This paper is an exploration of the differences between Standard Gujarati and its regional dialects at a colloquial level. It arises from fieldwork on diasporic Gujarati of Cape Town (Mesthrie & Chavda 2020), in which a number of features were found that do not accord with written and formal standard usage. Since fieldwork in India has not been possible under COVID, this paper reports on the oral field data of Cape Town (which accords largely with the Surti dialect) matched with copious observations of a dialectal nature in Grierson's *LSI* volume IX, part 2 on the Central Indo-Aryan group of Rajasthani and Gujarati. The first cluster of features deals with dental and retroflex interchanges. What are retroflexes in the standard may occasionally turn up as dentals in the dialects; though far more frequent is the reverse flow – of dentals becoming retroflexes.

The second cluster of features concerns a hitherto unnoticed chain shift in Gujarati dialects (reported on in Mesthrie 2021), involving the following consonants: *k, kh, c, ch, s, ś, h, ḥ, V, ø* (where *ś* denotes IPA [ʃ], *h* voiceless [h], *V* a murmured vowel and *ø* 'zero'). The chain shift can be discerned by comparing the colloquial forms in the regional dialects associated with lesser educated and less literate speakers with the standard Gujarati forms and those of Central Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi. This comparison yields the following correspondences giving the standard Gujarati and Central Indo-Aryan sounds first: *k, kh → c, ch; c, ch → s or ś; s → ḥ; h → V or ø*. The paper demonstrates (a) that this set of correspondences between standard Gujarati and the dialects is widespread, (b) that they do indeed suggest a chain shift, even though the dialects differ in finer details concerning structural conditioning and the parts of the shift that are most strongly taken up.

The paper thus shows that while the standard is firmly in the Central Indo-Aryan camp, the dialects of Gujarati analysed (Kathiawadi, Surti, Charotari and Pattani) align more closely with Western Indo-Aryan. Historical connections raised by this paradox are explored in respect of developments within Indo-Aryan branches.

Join us via Google Meet at <https://meet.google.com/que-iyze-ngg>

LIVE Streaming on



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/c/CIILMysore1>