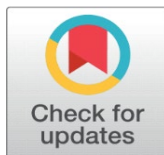
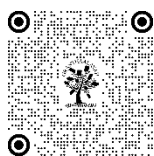


GUJARATI LANGUAGE: A SPECIMEN OF INDIAN CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Culture and language are two inseparable entities. Language reflects culture. Rather, it is an important exhibit of culture. Language is shaped by culture and culture is transmitted from one generation to the other through language. Each language has some peculiar characteristics through which it mirrors the culture. One of the most significant features is the vocabulary. The stock of words is the easily available and accessible material reflecting the true colours of any culture. Apart from that, some other features can also be found through the linguistic analysis of the language. This paper intends to show how Gujarati language reflects the Indian culture. This is done through the study of the vocabulary, usage and some intrinsic linguistic features of the language.

Keywords: Language, Culture, Gujarati Language, Indian Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Language reflects culture and is influenced by it. Rather, it is an important exhibit of culture. It is shaped by culture and culture is transmitted from one generation to the other through language. They reciprocally affect each other. The two are so intricately interwoven that they cannot be separated without losing the significance of the either. They combine to form a living organism.

Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, basic assumptions, and values that are shared by a group of people and that influence each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of the meanings of other people's behavior. And language is the medium for expressing and embodying other phenomena. It expresses the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society share by virtue of their socialization into it.

(Guessabi)

Language and culture are homologous mental realities. They are complexly entangled with each other. They share an intricate and strong relationship as they have evolved together, influencing and shaping one another in the process. Language communicates through culture and culture also communicates through language.

The referents of language are the entities, events, states, processes, characteristics and relations that exist in the culture. Language always indicates meanings and references beyond itself. The meanings of a particular language represent the culture of a particular social group. Thus, language marks the cultural identity.

Language and culture are so intertwined that it's often impossible to fully understand one without also understanding the other. The way we communicate, the words and expressions we use, and even the nonverbal cues we give, are all influenced by the cultural context in which we live and the language we speak...Language also plays a crucial role in shaping our identity and our sense of belonging to a particular group or community. (Karlik: 6)

The human communication process is multifaceted as many of our messages are transmitted through non-verbal behavior. These supplementary communication techniques are culture-specific. Learning a language, therefore, is not only learning the alphabet, the meaning, the grammar rules and the arrangement of words, but it is also learning the behavior of the society and its cultural norms.

The linguistic relativity principle states that the way in which people think about the world is directly influenced by the language they use to talk about it. Cultural products are representations and interpretations of the world. 'In fact, it can be argued that linguistic knowledge rarely lives devoid of the cultural context that shapes and molds the ways in which individuals view the world around them and adopt words in order to describe their world.' (Altarriba & Basnight-Brown: 865)

Each language has some peculiar characteristics through which it mirrors the culture. One of the most significant features is the vocabulary. The stock of words is the easily available and accessible material reflecting the true colours of any culture. Apart from that, some other features can also be found through the linguistic analysis of the language.

2. FEATURES OF GUJARATI LANGUAGE

Indian society and culture are a vibrant tapestry woven from the threads of diversity, tradition, and adaptation. From its multilingual landscape to its rich religious coexistence, India's unique features embody a harmonious blend of contrasts. Its cultural legacy, ethnic diversity, caste system, tribalism, and evolving family structures create a complex mosaic that reflects the country's historical evolution. (Gupta)

India is a multilingual country. Various regional languages reflect the Indian culture in their own unique ways. This paper intends to show the inseparability of culture and language and explores cultural content in specific linguistic items. The intimate relationship between the Gujarati language and the Indian culture is illustrated. This is done through the illustrations of vocabulary, usage and some intrinsic linguistic features of the language. Following are the instances in which the reflection of the Indian culture is clearly seen in the usage of the Gujarati language:

2.1. VOCABULARY

1) The Gujarati word 'દંપતી' (daMpatī) (a married couple) reflects the ancient Indian ideal of અર્ધનારી નટશ્વર (ardhnārī nateshvar) – a shape (half man and half woman) taken by lord Shiva to teach human beings the importance of the interdependence of both men and women. They have equally significant roles to play in society and equally vital responsibilities to share in life.

2) In Gujarati, a lot of names are found for indicating various relationships. For example: કાકા, મામા, માસી, ફોઈ, બનેલી, નણંદ, સાળા, સાદુભાઈ, વેવાણ, સાસુ, પિતરાઈ (kākā, māmā, māsī, foī, banevī, naṇaNd, sālā, sādhubhāi, vevāṇ, sāsū, pitarāi). Every relation has a distinct name. Each relationship is given due importance. This reflects social bonding. It also shows respect for even a distant relation. It demonstrates the close-knit structure of the Indian families. 'Indians generally place a high value on harmony and unity with others, keeping a strong nexus with their community and relatives. A unified and interdependent community or family provides a support system that an individual can rely on daily.' (Scroope)

3) There are variety of food items similar to bread (રોટલી, રોટલા, ભાખરી, થેપલા, ઢેબરા, પૂરી, પુડલા, પરોઠા) (roṭlā, roṭlī, bhākhri, theplā, dhebṛā, pūrī, puḍlā, paroṭhā), utensils (ડોયો, કડછો, ચમચી, ચમચો, ચીપિયો, તવેથો, ઝેરણી, ગળણી, સાંબેલું) (ḍoyo, kaḍchho, chamchī, chamcho, chīpiyo, tavetho, zeraṇī, gaḷaṇī, sāmbeḷuN), garments (ઘાઘરો, ચોળી, ઓઢણી, કમખો,

કેડિયું, ઘોતિયું, ખેસ, સાડી, પહેરણ) (ghāghro, choḷī, oḍhaṇī, kamkho, keḍiyuN, dhotiyuN, khes, sādī, paheraṇ), ornaments (ચૂંક, નથ, હાર, માળા, બલોયાં, ઝાંઝર, વીંટી, બંગડી, બાજુબંધ) (chūNk, nath, hār, māḷā, baloyāN, zāNzar, vīNṭī, baNgḍī, bājubaNdh). They reflect love for details and peculiarity. Some of these names are still used with the intention of preserving the traditions. They show multiplicity of cultures within a culture.

The essence of Indian multiculturalism finds resonance in the “Salad Bowl Theory.” In this analogy, the vast Indian society parallels a salad bowl, wherein newly introduced cultures seamlessly integrate without sacrificing their individual identities. Much like the ingredients in a salad bowl, these cultures remain distinct yet contribute harmoniously to the overarching composition. In essence, India’s multi-ethnicity is a captivating tapestry woven from a spectrum of racial backgrounds, showcasing a harmonious blend akin to the diverse yet unified elements in a salad bowl. (Gupta)

4) Apart from their religious context, Indian rituals and festivals play a crucial role in weaving the texture of the Indian culture. They serve as platforms for strengthening family ties and fostering a sense of community spirit...Each occasion is a celebration of faith, unity and the collective cultural heritage that binds the people of India together.

Rituals are an integral part of daily life in India. They are a way to connect with the divine, seek blessings, and express gratitude. These rituals are often passed down through generations, preserving the essence of India’s rich cultural history. From simple practices like lighting incense and offering prayers at home shrines to elaborate ceremonies conducted in temples, rituals are diverse and vary across different regions and religions.

Introduction to Indian Rituals and Festivals - Explore Indian Trails

There are a lot of names available for various religious and social rituals (છઠ્ઠી, નામકરણ, જનોઈ, વેવિશાળ, લગ્ન, પિતૃતર્પણ, સરવણી, શ્રાદ્ધ) (chhaththī, nāmkaṇaṇ, janoī, vevishāl, lagn, pitrutarpaṇ, saravaṇī, shrādhdh), ways of worship (પ્રાર્થના, ધુન, ભજન, સ્તુતિ, શ્લોક) (prāthnā, dhun, bhajan, stuti, shlok) and materials used for worship and rituals (દીવો, ધૂપસળી, અબીલ, ગુલાલ, કંકુ, સોપારી, કપૂર) (dīvo, dhūpsalī, abīl, gulāl, kaNku, sopārī, kapūr). They suggest the religious bent of mind of the Indians. They again reflect the love for distinctiveness. Some rituals are connected to the 16 ‘Samskaras’ found in the Hindu religion.

5) A lot of tatsam words are found in Gujarati. The words related to religion (ધર્મ) (dharm), philosophy (મીમાંસા) (mīmāNsā), spiritual knowledge (આત્મા) (ātmā), Ayurved (શૂળ) (shūl), astrology (ગ્રહ) (grah), samskara (ઉપનયન) (upanayan), rituals (વિવાહ) (vivāh) are tatsam words. They reflect the bond with the roots as they are directly taken from the mother language Sanskrit.

6) Numerous words are accepted in Gujarati from various Indian and foreign languages. For example: Bengali (મહાશય) (mahāshay), Dravidi (નાડી) (nāḍī), Hindi (જોબન) (joban), Kannad (એલચી) (elchī), Marathi (અટકાળ) (aṭkaḷ), Urdu (મફત) (mafāt), Perso-Arabic (ફાયદો) (fāydo), English (મિનિટ) (miniṭ), Portuguese (કાજુ) (kāju), African (ગોરીલા) (gorīlā), Australian (બૂમરેંગ) (būmreNg), Dutch (વલંદા) (valaNdā), French (કાફેટેરિયા) (kāfeṭeriyā), Japanese (કિમોનો) (kimono), Latin (ચર્ચ) (charch), Malay (બામ્બૂ) (bāMbū), Moratias (મોરસ) (moras), Russian (સ્પુટનિક) (spuṭanik), Turkey (બેગમ) (begam)

This feature of Gujarati language reflects unity in diversity. The Indian culture believes in accepting everything good from every direction. आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः। (Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions.)

7) Some peculiar words of Gujarati are difficult to be translated into other languages. These words have specific Indian connotations. For example: ઝૂલો/હીંચકો (zūlo/hīNchko) (reference to God, monarchy, infancy), ઘોડિયું (ghoḍiyuN) (reference to infancy, warmth), હાલરડું (hālaraḍuN) (reference to infancy, motherhood, music), આરતી/થાળ (ārtī/thāl)

(reference to worship, offerings to God), ઓટલો/ચોતરો (oṭlo/chotro) (reference to public meeting places), પરબ/ચબૂતરો (parab/chabūtro) (reference to service), ગુરૂજી (guruji) (big, great)

2.2. USAGE

1) Music is an integral part of the Indian culture. Indians love music. In Gujarati, the prosody brings music to poetry. Various meters decide the pattern of singing the poems. They add melody to them. Again, these meters also reflect the oral tradition of Indian culture. Meters provide the ease of singing and the literature that is sung is remembered well.

2) Since Sanskrit is the source/mother language of many Indian languages, the love for language embellishment is naturally inherited. A number of figures of speech used in Gujarati are the evidence for the same. The standard/literary language and the dialects make ample use of these figures of speech.

3) In Gujarati, the names of men are followed by the word 'ભાઈ' (bhāi) (literally meaning 'brother') and the names of women are followed by the word 'બહેન' (bahen) (literally meaning 'sister'). The elders and the strangers are addressed or referred to in this manner. While using these two words with the names, the verbs take the honorific plural form. This is the Gujarati way to reflect the Indian tradition of giving respect to everyone. This is also an intricate linguistic technique to demonstrate a cultural norm of maintaining distance from the strangers. That shows respect as well as detachment in broader context.

'Siblings, too, recognize age differences, with younger siblings addressing older siblings by respectful terms rather than by name.' (Jacobson) The elder siblings are addressed as 'ભાઈ' (bhāi) and 'બહેન' (bahen).

4) One more feature showing the love for language embellishment and love for sonorous sounds is the use of reduplicative words. They are sometimes the onomatopoeic words or the repetition of the same word or two words having only different sound. Their spellings appeal to eyes and their pronunciations appeal to ears. For example: ચૂપચાપ, હળવેહળવે, ખળખળ, રાતોરાત, અદલાબદલી (chūpchāp, haḷvehaḷve, khaḷkhaḷ, rātorāt, adlābadlī)

5) Plenty of participles and samas (compound words) reflect the Sanskrit literary tradition of brevity. They impart a kind of directness and specificity to language. For example: ભલુંભોળું, નવજીવન, જાણભેદ, હાથછડ, બોલચાલ (bhaluNbhoḷuN, navjīvan, jāṇbhedu, hāthchhaḍ, bolchāl)

6) Gujarati language has plenty of proverbs and idioms. People belonging to different social strata use the proverbs and idioms in different manner. In fact, their usage indicates the education, socio-economic status and demographic details of the user. For example: રંગ રાખવો, રંગ દેખાડવો, રંગમાં આવી જવું, ઝાઝા હાથ રળિયામણા, ડુંગરા દૂરથી રળિયામણા (raNg rākhvo, raNg dekhāḍvo, raNg māN āvī javuN, zāzā hāth raḷiyāmṇā, ḍuNgrā dūrthī raḷiyāmṇā)

7) In Gujarati, a number of words/phrases/expressions are used to greet or to bid farewell to people. For example: આવો, આવજો, જય માતાજી, જય શ્રી કૃષ્ણ, મહાદેવ હર, જય જિનેન્દ્ર (āvo, āvjo, jay mātājī, jay shrī kruṣhṇā, jay jinendra, mahādev har) These words reflect the Indian tradition of giving warm welcome to the guests. The same words, except 'આવો' (āvo), are used to bid farewell. They reflect the tradition of departing with the wishes of well-being. When people depart, they take the names of various gods and goddesses in order to show the feelings of welfare, prosperity and safety.

The Gujarati word 'આવજો' (āvjo), used commonly for saying 'goodbye' literally means 'come again'. This is the Indian tradition of giving invitation to the guests for another visit when they depart.

The concept of hospitality is another essential aspect of Indian culture. Guests are treated with utmost respect and are considered a part of the family. This tradition is deeply ingrained in the culture, and it is not uncommon for strangers to be invited into homes for a meal or celebration. (Thompson)

8) In India, men and women are treated differently. Men are given more importance than women. The young touch the feet of the elders and seek their blessings. In Gujarati, a boy or a man would be blessed with these words – પ્રગતિ કરો, સફળ થાવ, કુટુંબનું નામ ઉજાળો, ઝાઝી કમાણી કરો (pragati karo, safal thāv, kuṭuMb nuN nām ujālo, zāzī kamāṇī karo) (Grow well, Get success, Hail the name of the family, Earn plenty). But a girl or a woman would be blessed with these words – સુખી થાવ, સુખી કરો, સારો વર મળે, સારું ઘર મળે, અખંડ સૌભાગ્યવતી રહે, પુત્રવતી થાવ (sukhī thāv, sukhī karo, sāro var maḷe, sārūN ghar maḷe, akhaNḍ saubhāgyavatī raho, putravatī thāv) (Be happy and keep happy, Get a good husband, Get a good family, Long live your husband, Get a boy child). Progress, success and wealth are wished for a man and happy marital life, development of the family, (boy) childbirth, long life of the husband are wished for a woman. These blessings reflect the social expectations. They show the typical Indian mentality: preference to men.

9) 'Language often contains implicit cultural norms and etiquette. Understanding the nuances of language usage, such as appropriate forms of address, greetings and expressions of politeness, is essential for effective communication within a cultural context.' (Liu, 2024)

The public behaviour of the Indian people is regulated by the socio-cultural code of conduct. Following that, a variety of addresses are found in Gujarati. For example: a woman calls her husband using the words – એ, મીઠીના પપ્પા, સાંભળો છો? (e, mīṭhīnā pappā, sām̐bh̐lo chho?) and refers to him using the words – તમારા દીકરા, તમારા ભાઈ, તમારા ભત્રીજા (tamārā dīkrā, tamārā bhāi, tamārā bhatrījā). She uses the relation of her husband with the listener while referring to her husband. This shows the sense of respect, decency and modesty.

'Blood relations and kinship ties enjoy a stronghold over other social relationships in India...Kinship refers to a set of relationships and relatives formed thereof, based on blood relationships (consanguineal), or marriage (affinal).' (ClearIAS Team) The relatives of the spouses are addressed or referred to with the relation names having the suffix 'જી' (jī) – કાકાજી, માસીજી (kākājī, māsījī). That indicates the type of relation, i.e. personal or blood relation or relation through the spouse.

10) In Gujarati, some animals, birds and inanimate objects are given peculiar names indicating relationships. For example: સૂરજદાદા, ભારતમાતા, ગાયમાતા, ધરતીમાતા, ચાંદામામા, ઉંદરમામા, ચક્રીબેન (sūrajdādā, bhāratmātā, gāymātā, dhartīmātā, chāNdāmāmā, ūdarmāmā, chakīben) (sun, India, cow, earth, moon, rat, sparrow). This reflects the Indian custom of establishing bond or affinity with objects and giving respect to them. It also shows the importance of personification in Indian culture.

3. LINGUISTIC FEATURES

1) The Indian culture owe a lot to Sanskrit language and literature. A rich heritage is transmitted from Sanskrit to many Indian languages. Gujarati is not an exception. The most remarkable fact is that Gujarati has retained the Devnagari script, the one in which Sanskrit is written.

2) In Gujarati, vowels can be written as independent letters or by using a variety of diacritical marks which are written above, below, before or after the consonant they belong to. These diacritical marks show the beauty and complexity of the language. They are attached to the consonants reflecting the Indian tradition of interdependence. For example: કા, કો, કિ, કી, કુ, કૂ (kā, ko, ki, kī, ku, kū)

3) Gujarati is a syllabary language. Every syllable has its own unique realization in writing and speech. It cannot be written or pronounced in any other way. The Vaidik concept of unity of મન (man) (mind), વાચ (vāchā) (speech) and કર્મ (karm) (work) is reflected.

4) An extremely peculiar feature of Gujarati language is this – a consonant is incomplete without a vowel. All the consonants have an inherent vowel. Use of an incomplete consonant is rare. This reflects the Indian tradition of co-

existence; one is always depending on others. Again, the spiritual aspect of Indian culture is also reflected here – જીવ (jīv) is incomplete without શિવ (shiv).

5) In Gujarati, inanimate nouns are also assigned gender. This reflects the sense of affinity. It also demonstrates the tradition of giving importance to everything that is related to life. For example: હીંચકો (hīNchko) (masculine), ખાટ (khāt) (feminine), પારખું (pārṇuN) (neuter)

6) In Gujarati, agreement encompasses gender, number, case and person. Usually, subject and verb agree to each other. But in Gujarati, determiners, adjectives, verbs and adverbs show agreement to the subject. This reflects interconnectedness and interdependence. For example: પેલી (pelī) (det. Fem.) રૂપાળી (rupālī) (adj. fem.) છોકરી (chhokrī) (noun fem.) હસતી હસતી (hastī hastī) (adv. Fem.) મારી પાસે આવી (mārī pāse āvī) (verb fem.).

7) Gujarati language has numerous forms of verbs. Gender, number, person, case, time, aspect, mood – all these factors affect the shape of a verb. For example: કર, કરવું, કરતો, કરતી, કરતું, કરો, કર્યું, કરી, કર્યો, કરું (kar, karvuN, karto, kartī, kartuN, karo, karyuN, karī, karyo, karuN). This reflects Indian love for variety and preciseness.

8) There are a number of causal forms of verbs in Gujarati. For example: કરાવડાવ્યું, અપાવડાવ્યું, લખાવડાવ્યું (karāvdāvyuN, apāvdāvyuN, lakhāvdāvyuN). They are used to assign work to others. This reflects the custom of igniting others for work.

9) In Gujarati, plural forms of verbs are used with singular subject (masculine or feminine). The usage is called honorific plural. For example: બા આવ્યાં (bā āvyāN). ઋષિકેશ હસ્યા (ṛushikesh hasyā). This reflects the Indian tradition of giving respect to the elders. The plural form of verb is also used while talking to the seniors at the work place or the strangers in the other social settings. ‘(This) distinction is a reflection of one aspect of the culture. It indicates that there is a built-in awareness and significance to social differentiation and that a more formal level of language use is available.’ (Grothe: 4.1.4)

10) The second person singular pronoun તમે (tame) and આપ (āp) as well as the third person singular pronoun તેઓ (teo) are used with plural forms of verbs. This usage is also called honorific plural. This reflects the tradition of giving respect to the listener in general and elders / women in particular.

Again, the use of honorific plural ‘provide(s) a valuable device for maintaining relational distance when desired, for clearly distinguishing friends from acquaintances, and for preserving social harmony in institutional settings.’ (Grothe: 4.1.4)

11) The grammar of a language indicates certain aspects of social relationships. It reinforces a particular conception of interpersonal relations that exists in the culture ‘... the linguistic system of pronoun may encode conceptions of the social self in the culture. The use of pronouns sustains attention on the referent of the pronoun, bringing the person out from the conversational background.’ (Chiu: 7)

In Gujarati, the first-person plural pronoun has two distinct forms – ‘અમે’ (ame) and ‘આપણે’ (āpṇe). The first excludes the listener whereas the second includes the listener. The usage of the appropriate form of the first-person plural pronoun adds precision to the expression. This reflects the intention of clarifying the matter and avoiding ambiguity.

12) It is believed that the Indians are led more by the emotions than by the intellect. Hence, the emotional behaviour is important and is freely displayed. Gujarati gender suffixes and stem-enlarging suffixes reflect various human emotions. They add to the intensity of some particular emotions. For example: (i) irregular gender suffixes (પાઘડો, રૂપરડી, ગરીબડું) (pāghḍo, rupaṛāḍī, garībaḍuN) – disrespect, hatred, neglect, indifference etc. (ii) stem-enlarging suffixes (સાચુકલું, દડુલિયો, નાનકડું) (sāchukaluN, daḍuliyo, nānakaḍuN) – love, beauty, care etc.

13) The Indian love for specific expression and detailing is reflected in the Gujarati numerals. For example: એક, એકડો, એકમ, એકકો, એકેએક, એકાદું, એકલદોકલ, એકવડું, પહેલો, પ્રથમ, અડધું, દાયકો, બેગણું, ઘડિયાના અંક (ek, ekdo, ekam, ekko, ekeek, ekāduN, ekaldokal, ekvaḍuN, pahelo, pratham, aḍḍhuN, dāyko, begaṇuN, ghaḍiyānā aNk)

14) Sandhi is another significant characteristic of Gujarati language. For example: સૂર્યોદય, નવોદા, સ્વસ્તિ (sūryoday, navoḍhā, svasti). Here, the words become inseparable. It reflects the Indian feeling of oneness and affinity.

15) In Gujarati, the verbs meaning 'learn' and 'teach' are ભણવું / શીખવું (bhaṇvuN/shikhvuN) and ભણાવવું / શીખાવવું (bhaṇāvavuN/shīkhavavuN). Both of these sets of words ભણવું – ભણાવવું (bhaṇvuN – bhaṇāvavuN) and શીખવું – શીખાવવું (shikhvuN – shīkhavavuN) have the same root verb. This indicates the inseparableness and continuity of these processes. It shows that the teacher learns during the process of teaching.

16) The Indian society is the patriarchal society since ages. The default referent is 'he' in Gujarati. This reflects the patriarchal bent of the Indian culture. 'The eldest male acts as family head...Traditionally, males have controlled key family resources, such as land or businesses...' (Jacobson)

4. CONCLUSION

Thus, Gujarati language proves to be a remarkable specimen of the Indian culture. The vocabulary, usages and some internal linguistic aspects reflect the essence of the culture to which the language belongs.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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