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 & Chauva 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 Surati 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: \( k, kh, c, ch, s, \dot{s}, h, v, \phi \) (where \( \dot{s} \) denotes IPA [\( \ddot{s} \)], \( h \) voiceless [\( h \)], \( V \) a murmured vowel and \( \phi \) ‘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: \( k \rightarrow \dot{c}, ch \rightarrow c, ch \rightarrow or s, s \rightarrow h; h \rightarrow V_{or} \phi \). 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.

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