In what ways does Bhatt use words and structure to show what she feels about language?

You may want to refer to the following guiding questions:

- How Bhatt uses language to develop her metaphor (structure inclusion of Gujarati..)
- How ‘language’ is part of Bhatt’s idea of identity

Remember a good essay will reference each of the boxes of the framework in some way; use the framework to help find a range of ways Bhatt presents her ideas of language.

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In “Search for My Tongue,” Sujata Bhatt uses both language and structure to express her complex emotions about losing and rediscovering her mother tongue. Through vivid imagery, the inclusion of Gujarati within the poem, and the structure of physical and emotional transformation, Bhatt reveals how deeply language is tied to identity and survival.

Bhatt begins the poem by presenting a metaphor for language loss. She speaks of having “two tongues” in her mouth, one being the “mother tongue” and the other the “foreign tongue.” Her use of everyday language here makes the struggle relatable, while the metaphor turns an invisible internal experience into something physical and painful. She describes the mother tongue as something that would “rot and die in your mouth,” using strong, visceral language to show the sense of decay and loss she feels when her native language is pushed aside. The verbs “rot,” “die,” and “spit” create an image of violent rejection, reflecting the emotional and cultural damage caused by losing a first language.

Structurally, Bhatt disrupts the flow of the poem by inserting a middle section written entirely in Gujarati. This physical change in language forces the reader to confront the very experience Bhatt describes: confusion, separation, and alienation. For readers who do not understand Gujarati, this part becomes inaccessible, mirroring Bhatt’s fear of losing the ability to understand or express herself in her own language. However, for Bhatt, the Gujarati section is essential, symbolising the persistence of her original voice and identity even when it seems suppressed.

The structure of the poem itself follows a journey of loss and regrowth. At the start, Bhatt expresses the idea that the mother tongue has been “spit out” and lost. However, as the poem progresses, she describes a powerful natural image: the mother tongue grows back “overnight while I dream” like a “stump of a shoot” developing “strong veins.” Through this organic metaphor, Bhatt shows that language is not easily destroyed — it is rooted deep within her and can regenerate unexpectedly. The structure moves from decay to new life, emphasising her ultimate hope and pride in retaining her linguistic heritage.

Bhatt’s choice of words in the final section reflects this positive transformation. Words like “grows,” “moist,” “strong veins,” and “blossoms” suggest health, vitality, and inevitability. Language, once thought dead, comes back naturally and powerfully, tying the two parts of her identity together. The “bud” that “opens” in her mouth shows that the mother tongue is not passive but active — it asserts itself and “pushes the other tongue aside.” This action shows that, although Bhatt lives with two languages, her original language remains a dominant, living force in her identity.

Overall, Bhatt uses vivid, sometimes violent imagery, the literal structure of switching languages, and a progression from decay to renewal to show that language is central to her emotional life and self-understanding. Through “Search for My Tongue,” she powerfully conveys that the mother tongue is not something that can be easily erased; it is deeply ingrained and will always find a way to re-emerge.

Word Count: 502