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Grog and Gossip in Bhatgaon: Style and Substance in Fiji Indian Conversation

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grog and gossip in Bhatgaon: style and substance in Fiji Indian conversation

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The central question in the anthropological study of gossip has long been, What is gossip about? Gluckman (1963:308), for example, suggests that gossip and scandal “maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups. . . . they enable these groups to control the competing cliques and aspiring individuals of which all groups are composed.” For Gluckman the content of gossip—the message it conveys—is primarily concerned with the implicit, sometimes negative articulation of group values. Paine (1967:282), by contrast, argues that “gossip, whatever else it may be in a functional sense, is also a cultural device used by an individual to further his own interests”; gossip contains information about others, shaped strategically to suit the speaker’s ends (see also Cox 1970; Szwed 1966). From both perspectives the proper objects of study are the texts and topics of gossip; disagreement lies in how these materials and their implications are to be evaluated.

In this paper I argue that as important as the question of what gossip is *about* may be, our anthropological preoccupation with it has prevented us from looking at gossip itself in any great detail. To some extent this reflects a broader cultural notion that language is primarily a descriptive tool, a way of making propositional statements about the world (see Myers and Brenneis 1984 for a more detailed discussion). Our interpretations have concentrated on what gossip says about people and values and have largely ignored how it is said. In so doing we have neglected the nonreferential features and implications of gossip as an activity. A few anthropologists, notably Edmonson (1966), Gossen (1974), and Abrahams (1970), have drawn attention to the stylistic character of gossip itself, analyzing it in terms of community ideas of verbal art, license, and decorum; others such as M. Goodwin (1980, 1982) focus on its interactional character and ways by which language use generates social relationships. When Edmonson, Gossen, and Abrahams consider the content of gossip, it is essentially as a way of getting at style; the rhetorical effects of what gossip is about are neglected. Goodwin, by contrast, considers prosodic, syntactic, and interactional features in some detail; her analysis centers on relationships between particular syntactic forms; especially embedding (Goodwin 1980:689), and the presentation of information. In this she

Anthropological studies of gossip have been preoccupied with its content; as important as the question of what gossip is about may be, such a focus has prevented a close examination of gossip itself as both text and activity. This paper is concerned with talanoa, a gossip genre among Hindi-speaking Fiji Indians. It demonstrates the close relationships among gossip topic, performance style, and social process in a rural community. [gossip, ethnography of speaking, political discourse, egalitarian communities, overseas Indians]

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uses stylistic features as a way of understanding the organization of content and the establishment of a recurring interactional frame (“he-said-she-said”) that ramifies throughout social relationships. I seek to broaden still further our understandings of gossip by reference to larger sociopolitical features of community life in which gossip clearly plays an important role.

This paper examines a variety of verbal interaction, herein glossed as “gossip,” in a Fiji Indian rural village. This type of talk, labeled in village Hindi by the Fijian loan word *talanoa*,¹ is one way of speaking within the larger domain of *batcit* (“conversation” or “discussion”). *Talanoa* is not a clearly demarcated genre in itself. Certain stylistic, semantic, and contextual features are associated with it, but they are evident to some extent in other kinds of conversation as well; villagers speak of *talanoa* in degrees. *Talanoa* is not the only way in which information about absent others is conveyed in Bhatgaon, but that it is talk about absent others is central to its definition. As the private, essentially illicit discussion and evaluation of others, *talanoa* is regarded by many villagers as *fakutiya bat* (“worthless doings”).² This negative evaluation extends to the language of *talanoa* as well, as it draws on the forms and vocabulary of local, rustic Fiji Hindi rather than on those of the Standard Fiji Hindi used for public occasions. Despite these negative features, villagers clearly delight in *talanoa* and relish both the scandals themselves and the highly stylized ways in which they are discussed.

approaching *talanoa*

In my consideration of *talanoa* I am guided by four premises. First, *talanoa* cannot be treated in isolation but must be seen as part of the expressive and communicative repertoire of a community; its character and implications are tied to those of other ways of speaking. Second, gossip is both about something and something in itself. It works in both referential and nonreferential ways at the same time (see Silverstein 1976), and a consideration of gossip should not be limited to one or the other. Third, gossip necessarily involves two kinds of social relationships—those between the gossipers and their subject and those between the gossipers themselves. The functions of gossip in the two relationships are quite different, as are the ways in which those functions are accomplished. Finally, the stylistic features of *talanoa* in Bhatgaon are both striking and substantial. They not only mark *talanoa* but have a great deal to do with its effectiveness. The formal features of *talanoa* operate in different and quite specific ways vis-à-vis both the kinds of relationships mentioned above and the larger social context.

Bhatgaon: a Fiji Indian community

Bhatgaon is a rural village of 690 Hindi-speaking Fiji Indians located on the northern side of Vanua Levu, the second largest island in the Dominion of Fiji. The villagers are the descendants of north Indians who came to Fiji between 1879 and 1919 as indentured plantation workers. Bhatgaon was established in the early 1900s and now (July 1980) includes 91 households. There has been little migration to or from the village for the past 20 years, and there is a wide age-span among the villagers. Most families lease rice land from the Government of Fiji; although they may work as seasonal cane cutters or in other outside jobs, most men consider themselves rice farmers. Rice and dry-season vegetables are raised primarily for family use, although surplus produce may be sold to middlemen. Leaseholds are generally small, and rice farming does not offer Bhatgaon villagers the same opportunities

for wealth available in sugarcane-raising areas. Since 1974 a number of village men have been able to spend four months in New Zealand doing agricultural work under Fiji government auspices.

Both men and women are politically active in the community, but they take part in very different ways and in different settings. Men are the performers in such public political events as religious speechmaking and insult singing (Brenneis 1978; Brenneis and Padarath 1975). Women may speak in mediation sessions as witnesses, but these important political events are organized and run by men. Political participation by women generally occurs in less public settings, as does much male politicking through *talanoa*.

Among males an overt egalitarian ideology prevails. Although ancestral caste appears to influence marriage choice to some extent (Brenneis 1974:25), it has few daily consequences in Bhatgaon. As one villager said, *Gaon me sab barabba hei* ("In the village all are equal"). This public ideology is manifest in such practices as sitting together on the floor during religious events and equal opportunity to speak. The roots of this egalitarian outlook lie in the conditions of immigration and indenture, central among them the difficulty of maintaining subcaste identity and purity and the disappearance of the hierarchical division of labor which helped sustain the caste system in north India (Mayer 1972; Brown 1981; Brenneis 1979). Egalitarian values are reinforced by the relative similarity in wealth throughout Bhatgaon. Such egalitarianism, however, is problematic in several important respects. First, not every villager is a potential equal. Sex is a crucial dimension; men do not consider women their equals. Age is also consequential. Adolescent boys (*naujawan*) are accorded less respect than older, married men (*admi*). As there are no formal criteria or ceremonies to mark the transition from *naujawan* to *admi*—to social adulthood—disagreements about how one should be treated are common and often lead to serious conflict between males of different ages.

A second problematic aspect of Bhatgaon egalitarianism is the delicate balance between people who should be equals. One of the hallmarks of such an egalitarian community is that individual autonomy is highly prized. Equals are those who mutually respect each other's freedom of action. Attempting too overtly to influence the opinions or actions of another is a violation of this equality. Further, individual reputation is central to one's actual social position. A man's reputation is subject to constant renegotiation through his own words and deeds and through those of others. Villagers are quite sensitive to perceived attempts by others to lower their reputations; the fear of reprisal by the subject of a gossip session has an important constraining effect upon the form of those sessions. Reputation management is a constant concern in disputes, for conflict often arises from apparent insult, and the remedy lies in the public rebalancing of one's reputation with that of one's opponent.

A number of men are recognized as *bada admi* ("Big Men") because of their past participation in village affairs, religious leadership, education, or other personal accomplishment. They also gain respect through the successful management of the disputes of others. Their status is always under stress, however, as obtrusive attempts to assert authority or to intervene in the problems of others abuse the autonomy of other men. Successful Big Men do not exercise their informal power ostentatiously. Continued effectiveness as a respected advisor depends on an overt reluctance to assume leadership. Even when requested to intervene in a dispute, Big Men are often unwilling; they fear both being identified with one party's interests and being considered overeager to display power. The willing exercise of authority leads to its decline.

Although there is a police station 5 km away, there are no formal social control agencies in Bhatgaon itself. The village has a representative on the district advisory council, but he is

not empowered to regulate affairs within Bhatgaon. With the decline of caste as an organizational feature of Fiji Indian life, such bodies as caste councils are no longer available for conflict management. Conflict in Bhatgaon remains largely dyadic, the concern of the contending parties alone; yet, as long as the disputes are dyadic, the chances of a settlement are slim. The face-to-face negotiation of a serious dispute is usually impossible, as open accusation or criticism of another is taken as a grievous insult. The offended party might well express his displeasure through nonverbal, nonconfrontational violence—for example, cutting down his opponent's banana trees. While such vandalism would not be praised, other villagers would interpret it as the natural result of direct confrontation or insult and would not intervene. Only a *kara admi* ("hard man") would risk such revenge through direct discussion; most villagers resort to more indirect strategies.

It is difficult to enlist third parties in the management of a conflict, but such triadic participation is crucial. The recruitment of others, not as partisans but as intermediaries and mediators, is a central goal of disputants. Compelling the interest and involvement of disinterested parties is therefore a major end in dispute discourse. Not surprisingly, avoidance remains the most common means of managing conflict.

Central to an understanding of discourse in Bhatgaon is a consideration of the sociology of knowledge in the community. As in any society, both what people talk about and how they talk about it are to some extent informed by what they know, what they expect others to know, and what they and others should know. However, just as local organization and social values were transformed during immigration, indenture, and postplantation life, expectations concerning the social distribution of knowledge were also dramatically altered from those characteristic of north Indian villages.

The radical leveling of Indian immigrant society in Fiji had obvious implications for the allocation of knowledge in Bhatgaon. While in north India the differential distribution of knowledge had both reflected and sustained a system of ranked but interdependent caste groups, in Fiji the groups were at best ill defined; the division of labor in part responsible for the division of knowledge no longer existed. Secular knowledge became, in effect, open to all.

In Bhatgaon, at least, there was a corresponding democratization of sacred knowledge as well. The reformist *arya samaj* sect has as a central tenet the notion of *sikca* ("instruction"). Members are expected to educate both themselves and others in religious practice and understanding. The stated purpose of most types of public communication, from hymns to religious speeches, is mental and spiritual improvement (Brenneis 1978, 1983). Although reform Hindus are a minority in Bhatgaon, their stress on instruction has had a considerable effect on orthodox villagers.

The generally egalitarian nature of social life in Bhatgaon has a counterpart in the relatively equal opportunity of all villagers to pursue knowledge, both sacred and secular. The sacred has become shared knowledge, no longer, in most cases, the property of a particular group. It is important to note, however, that where egalitarian ideals are stressed, continuing symbols of one's membership in a community of peers are necessary. One must not only feel membership but be able to display it publicly. Apparent exclusion from the community is taken very seriously, and knowledge continues to define one's social identity.

A crucial way of demonstrating one's membership is through sharing in what is "common knowledge" in the community—what "everyone" knows. Sacred and technical knowledge can be included in this, but it is relatively unchanging. The real action lies in the dynamics of everyday life; familiarity with local events and personalities is necessary. No one, however, knows everything, and some villagers are considerably better acquainted with particular incidents than are others. This differential participation in common knowledge lies at the root of *talanoa* in Bhatgaon.

The general features of male speaking in Bhatgaon derive in large part from the community's character as an acephalous, egalitarian one in which individuals are concerned both with their own reputations and freedom of action and with maintaining those of others, particularly of men with whom they are on good terms. One's enemies present a more complex situation. Their reputations are tempting targets, but too overt or successful an attack might lead to immediate revenge or preclude future reconciliation, as the insult would be too grievous to remedy.

These broad features of life in Bhatgaon underlie a speech economy the salient feature of which is indirection.³ One rarely says exactly what one means. Instead, in a variety of public and private performance genres, speakers must resort to metaphor, irony, double entendre, and other subtle devices to signal that they mean more than they have said. Such indirection is clearly a strategy for critical junctures, for situations in which overt criticism or comment would be improvident or improper. Public occasions recurrently pose the same dilemma: one must both act politically and avoid the appearance of such action. The perils of direct confrontation and of direct leadership in the village have fostered oblique, metaphoric, and highly allusive speech. Understanding political discourse in Bhatgaon therefore requires both the interpretation of texts in themselves and the unraveling of well-veiled intentions.

In such genres as *parbacan* ("religious speeches") oblique reference is particularly marked. *Parbacan* are oratorical performances with ostensibly sacred content given at weekly religious services. Their contents are not ambiguous in themselves; it is easy for the Hindi-speaking outsider familiar with Hinduism to follow an analysis of, for example, the fidelity of Sita, the wife of the epic hero Ram. The relationship between such a text and its intended function, however, remains quite opaque. The audience knows that some speakers have no hidden agenda while others are using *parbacan* for political ends.⁴ Such indirection both precludes revenge and pricks the curiosity of others, who feel they should understand what is really going on. A successful *parbacan* compels the interest and involvement of potential third parties.

Even in those events where relatively direct reference is necessary, such as *panchayats* ("mediation sessions"), procedural rules severely limit what can be discussed. *Panchayat* testimony focuses on specific incidents rather than ranging freely over the history of disputants' past relations (cf. Gibbs 1967; Nader 1969; Cohn 1967); further, it is elicited through quite direct and topically restricted questions. No decisions are reached in such mediation sessions. A coherent public account of disputed events is produced through testimony; participants and audience are left to draw their own conclusions about the implications of the account. Again, the effects of a concern for individual reputation and autonomy are evident (Brenneis 1980).

A second important feature of men's talk in Bhatgaon is that the culturally ascribed purpose of most genres of public, generally accessible performance is *sikca* ("instruction"). Whatever intentions individual speakers might have, their texts must focus on such topics as moral and spiritual improvement; their apparent motives must be didactic. Such genres as *parbacan* work politically by joining sacred teaching with covert secular interests. The political implications of mediation sessions are more overt. They provide authoritative and licit public explanations—though not evaluations—of particular incidents; villagers can refer to these authoritative accounts in later discussions without fear of revenge. Mediation sessions "teach" not so much through their content as through the manner in which they are conducted—that is, in a neutral spirit and with proper respect for individual sensibilities.

Private conversation (*batcit*), whether *talanoa* or not, is not limited by this concern for instruction. Its topics may range from national politics to the weather, the selection of a topic depending on the participants and their shared interests, not on generic requirements. Most *batcit* is neutrally evaluated: conversation does not offer the same scope for instruction as speechmaking, but it is rarely inherently bad. One of the important features of *talanoa* is that it is clearly considered *fakutiya* ("worthless"). That *talanoa* is seen as worthless or wasteful reflects the villagers' evaluation of its content: nothing of value can be gained from such conversations. One can, nonetheless, learn a great deal from such talk, especially given its potential dangers.

Talk is evaluated not solely in terms of topic. Artfulness, fluency, and wit are highly prized along dimensions specific to each genre. Speechmakers, for example, should display a good knowledge of standard Fiji Hindi, a large Sanskritic vocabulary, and a knack for apposite parables. While *talanoa* is considered worthless in itself, men who excel in it are much appreciated. In distinction to other kinds of *batcit*, *talanoa* is clearly a variety of verbal performance—it "involves on the part of the performer an assumption of responsibility to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content" (Bauman 1977:11; see also Hymes 1975). As shall be evident below, it is a somewhat singular kind of performance—focusing on stigmatized subjects, using a low-prestige variety of Hindi. Nonetheless, it is an important type of verbal art in the village.

Genres of verbal activity in Bhatgaon are linked together not only in terms of the expressive repertoire of the village but in an inferential web as well. Given the indirect character of public communication, a crucial question is how one learns the background information in terms of which these oblique references can be interpreted. My own initial sense was that *parbacan* made sense because of what the audience had learned or would learn through gossip, that *talanoa* would carry the real communicative burden behind the scenes. However, a more detailed consideration of *talanoa* has shown the process to be considerably more complex. How one learns what is going on in the village remains very problematic.

***talanoa* as text**

Most *talanoa* sessions take place in the early evening when the day's work is completed and village men sit with a few friends or kinsmen and drink *yaqona*, a beverage made from the roots of the *Piper methysticum* tree and frequently referred to as "grog." *Yaqona* drinking has long been a ceremonial focus in Fijian life; Fiji Indian grog drinking is considerably less ritualized. The drink has relatively few physiological effects and does not so much intoxicate as provide a focus for relaxed and amiable conviviality. Grog is most frequently drunk inside the *belo*, a thatched sitting house found on most village homesteads. Drinking may go on for several hours, after which the men eat dinner and retire for the night.

While women from the household might sit in the *belo* doorway and occasionally join in conversation, grog drinking and *talanoa* are chiefly male activities. This is not to say that women do not gossip, but their gossip occurs in different settings and is not labeled *talanoa*. Only fairly close friends who may be kin as well participate in *talanoa* sessions. The men drop by to drink and chat; rarely is a formal invitation extended. Occasionally, someone comes with a particular purpose in mind, but more frequently sociability is the goal. The gossiping group is in most cases small, rarely exceeding four men; should an additional man join the group, especially one who is not an intimate, the topic will most likely change. At a grog party most of the talk is *batcit* ("general conversation"). From time to

time speakers will move to topics and styles associated with *talanoa* and then return to less-marked discussion.

The linguistic code used in *talanoa* is frequently referred to as *jangli bat* ("jungle talk"), a local variety of Fiji Hindi. *Jangli bat* is usually contrasted with *shudh Hindi* ("sweet Hindi"), a dialect considerably closer to Hindi as spoken in India. *Shudh Hindi* is the language of religious oratory and public events; it is the "vernacular" used for early instruction in elementary school. *Jangli bat* is associated with home, farm, and informal conversation. The two varieties are not clearcut alternatives, however, but represent two ends of a continuum. The language of *talanoa* is considered to be the most *jangli* variety available, at the same time a source of shame and of rural pride.

The generic boundaries of *talanoa* are somewhat fuzzy and include both topical and stylistic elements. *Talanoa* must be about the less-than-worthy doings of absent others. In addition, a complex of stylistic features are linked with *talanoa*, though they need not all be present for a conversation to be so classified. The texts in the appendix of this paper represent a moderately marked piece of *talanoa* and a considerably more striking one. Villagers use such terms as "light" or "deep" to describe how extreme a particular conversation is; the second transcript is of a very heavy conversation.

"*Talanoa* at Dharm Dutt's", while only a moderate example of *talanoa*, displays many of the characteristics of *talanoa*—differences between it and "*Talanoa* at Sham Narayan's" are primarily a matter of degree. The two speakers in the first transcript are an elderly man (R) and his deceased younger brother's son (DD), a close neighbor and a good friend. DD also participates in the conversation at Sham Narayan's house. The others involved are HN and SN, brothers, sons of DD's mother's sister, and very close friends of DD. I was also present at both sessions, making the tape recordings which the transcripts in part represent.

The incident discussed at Dharm Dutt's house was a dispute about the amount of money that villagers recently returned from seasonal work in New Zealand should pay to the village road fund. Before leaving for New Zealand the men had signed a promissory letter agreeing to give the village F\$150 each for sponsorship in the labor program. They did not make as much money as expected in New Zealand, and most were reluctant to pay the full amount. Lal Dutt, the village representative on the district advisory council and the instigator of the promissory letter, refused to accept less than the promised amount. By the time DD and R were discussing the issue, a number of attempts at resolving the disagreement had been made, several catalyzed by Praya Ram, an older village man who is often considered to be a *bada admi* ("Big Man"). The first part of the transcript is a narrative of several stages in the dispute, while the latter portion includes more evaluatory comments and suggestions for how the disagreement should be handled.

In the second transcript, HN, DD, and SN are discussing the remarkable events of the night before at Praya Ram's house, where he lives with his wife and his married son Vajra Deo and his wife and their children. The entire family had been threshing and bagging rice for storage on the previous day, in the course of which they got Praya Ram's blanket dirty. That evening a number of family members drank locally produced rice whiskey, getting quite drunk in the process; Praya Ram was not home and did not drink with them. Upon his return, however, he found the house full of intoxicated people and his sleeping blanket still dirty from the threshing. A series of altercations followed, during which Vajra Deo fled the house with a rope, seriously threatening to hang himself. Praya Ram chased him and some of the quickly gathered spectators with a knife. By the time a number of neighbors had reached the house, everything was again quiet. The next day Praya Ram called the police to come and interview his family. They came to the village, talked with a few people, and left. Almost all of the second transcript consists of a narrative of these events.

The most striking feature of these transcripts is how difficult it would be to reconstruct the underlying events on the basis of the *talanoa* texts themselves. To some extent contextual cues help in making sense of what is said, but generally participants in *talanoa* sessions must come to them with some understanding of what is being discussed. *Talanoa* is in part referential—it is about something—but it is a very opaque kind of referentiality.

One major feature contributing to this opacity is the lack of any orientation in *talanoa* narratives (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Kernan and Sabsay 1982). One is never told why a story is being told, and the links between the account and preceding discourse are never made clear. Instead, the *talanoa* performer leaps right in *medias res*, frequently identifying his character obliquely, if at all. This feature contrasts markedly with most accounts of gossip in other communities, where the identification of those being talked about is considered an essential, initial part of any gossiped story (see, e.g., Haviland 1977:51; M. Goodwin 1982). While the usual absence of orientation and identification suggests that *talanoa* does not meet the generic standards for well-formed narratives generally found in the literature, it is clear that these features are not necessary from the villagers' point of view.⁵

A particularly marked feature of *talanoa* discourse is the remarkable frequency with which the word *bole* (literally, the third-person singular present form of the verb "to speak") appears.⁶ Further, *bole* rarely appears with a subject, a generally unacceptable occurrence in even *jangli* Hindi. *Bole ki* ("says that") frequently occurs with a subject as a quotative frame in Awadhi, the Indian variety of Hindi from which Fiji Hindi is most directly descended (R. Miranda 1982:personal communication), but the particular form and frequency of *bole* in *talanoa* appears to be a peculiarly Fiji Indian phenomenon. The confusions possible in this use of *bole* are further compounded by the fact that it sometimes is used to mean something much like the English "I hear" or "They say," and at other times is used to quote unidentified speakers. In either situation the use of *bole* has the effect of distancing the speaker from the subject about which he is speaking; it is not one's own account but something which has been heard (see also M. Goodwin 1980; Vološinov 1971).

In the first transcript *bole* almost always occurs in contexts where reported speech might be occurring. For example, DD says (1.8): *tab Praya Ram bole hamlog dusre aidia lagai bole dusre skim lagai aise nahi thik hei*. The second *bole* has Praya Ram as subject; its text (*Dusre skim . . . nahi thik hei*) works both syntactically and semantically as a quote. In the second transcript, the deeper *talanoa*, a solely quotative interpretation of *bole* is difficult to sustain. In HN's speech (2.9), for example, there is no obvious subject. Further, while any single "quoted" phrase following *bole* might reasonably be taken as reported speech, it is highly unlikely that the entire string of phrases is intended as quotation.

Bole is not the only verb to lack a subject. Especially in the second transcript actions frequently appear without apparent actors. Subject deletion is not a feature of ordinary *jangli bat*, and such passages as HN's first long turn (2.7) are syntactically quite confusing. The confusion is heightened by a fairly free variation in verb form between the simple past tense (in *jangli* Hindi the third-person singular form ends in *-is*, as in *kaderis*, or "chased") and what strictly is the impolite imperative form (*-ao* or *-io* endings, as in *lagao*, or "fasten"), which is characteristic of the plantation-pidginized Hindi spoken between laborers and European supervisors. From their linguistic context it is clear that verbs with the latter endings should be understood as past tense.

Although it is not evident in the transcripts, rapid and rhythmic delivery is characteristic of *talanoa*. *Bole* plays an important role in this, as it divides the discourse into syntactic and rhythmic chunks. It frequently is stressed and lengthened vis-à-vis the rest of the text, and these stress patterns give a pulsing feel to the *talanoa* as a whole. *Talanoa* displays a number of other prosodic features as well. Assonance and alliteration are quite marked, and exaggerated intonation contours and volume variation frequently occur. The repetition

or near repetition of words and phrases are common, as are plays with word order. Reduplication (*garmi-garmi*, “hot” or “angry”; 1.20) and partial reduplication (*polis-ulis*, “police”; 2.3) are common in *jangli* Hindi but particularly marked in *talanoa*.

All of these features have a great deal to do with a larger structural feature of *talanoa*. *Talanoa* rarely has a single performer. While one man may do most of the talking, usually at least one other will participate in the performance. One’s auditors are not limited to grunts of encouragement but are expected to contribute to the construction of a narrative. Overlaps between speakers are fairly frequent in *talanoa* in contrast to ordinary village discourse. Such overlaps lead not to conversational repair but to continuity between two speakers; they contribute to the coproduction of *talanoa* narratives.⁷

The stylistic features described above are instrumental in the coordination of the speakers’ performances. *Bole*’s rhythmic and segmenting effects are particularly important as they mark potential entry points for the other speaker. An example of this is in the second transcript, where HN joins in (*Ha. Bole . . .*) while DD says “*Kahe bole . . .*” (2.16, 2.15). Such junctures allow for a continuing flow of talk from speaker to speaker.

Most transitions between *talanoa* speakers do not involve overlap but are linked through some stylistic feature. Direct repetition of the preceding speaker’s words is fairly common, as are word order plays between speakers (see, e.g., 2.4-2.7). Speakers also frequently maintain the tempo and meter set by their predecessors. Although there may be two or more performers, *talanoa* is one performance, united in subject and style.

The degree to which there is such copformance appears to be one of the dimensions along which heavy and light *talanoa* are distinguished. The first transcript is close to a one-man show; R’s participation is, with a few exceptions, limited to supportive murmurs and questions intended to further D’s account. All of the stylistic features of *talanoa* are present but to a moderate extent. In the second transcript HN initiates the *talanoa* in the midst of a more general conversation, but DD quickly joins in as a coauthor. Features present in the first example are exaggerated in the second.

There are no other genres of adult male discourse which display the stylistic and organizational features of *talanoa*, nor are there any in which joint performance occurs. *Talanoa*, however, is remarkably similar to children’s arguments in the village (Lein and Brenneis 1978). Children’s arguments are characterized by exaggerated prosodic features, self- and other-repetition of both texts and stylistic strategies, the use of shared rhythmic framework, and considerable coordinated overlap between speakers. The texts of arguments are considerably more direct than those of *talanoa*, and the *bole* construction is not used. Apart from particular similarities, *talanoa* and such arguments share a remarkable sense of verbal playfulness. The manipulation of forms and the simultaneously competitive and cooperative construction of a joint performance provide pleasure for participants and audience alike. Adults do not argue like children do; in rare moments of direct confrontation between disputants playfulness is never evident. What I suggest here is that communicative styles learned in one type of context in childhood become part of one’s repertoire; in later life these styles can be adapted to new settings and uses.⁸

***talanoa* as activity**

Gossip necessarily involves the gossipers in two simultaneous social relationships: with each other and with the subjects of their talk. In this concluding section I explore the relationships between the formal features of *talanoa* and these two social dimensions. In so doing I also suggest the very important nonreferential functions which *talanoa* appears to serve.

Perhaps the central concern of gossipers about their subjects is that their comments do not lead to irreparable damage; one gossips as frequently about friends as enemies. One way of trying to prevent such difficulties is to limit gossiping to trustworthy auditors. Even with care, however, information leaks are possible. The relative opacity of *talanoa* texts and the systems of indirect reference sustained through the *bole* construction help to make speakers less than fully culpable for their commentary. It is not fortuitous that the use of *bole* developed in the relatively amorphous social world of Fiji Indian villages: it provides an effective way of distancing speakers from their speech, of allowing them denial as defense. Such responsibility as speakers have is shared with their co-authors; joint performance helps to shield gossipers from anger and possible revenge.

If the effects of *talanoa* style in relations with subjects are largely preventive, the same stylistic features have a quite different role in regard to the gossipers themselves. First, the same indirection that helps to prevent revenge from others also leaves open the options of one's listeners. The possibility of multiple interpretation helps to maintain the autonomy of participants: they are not forced to accept a straightforward and unambiguous account. Second, the stylistic and organizational features of *talanoa* allow—indeed, almost compel—a kind of conversational duet. Rhythm, repetition, syntactic play, and the *bole*-defined chunking of discourse not only invite coparticipation but enable a remarkable degree of stylistic convergence on the part of the speakers. As Gumperz (1982) has recently argued, divergences in conversational style can lead to the definition and maintenance of social differentiation. Convergence can have the opposite effect, emphasizing the shared qualities and social identities of the speakers.

It is clear that *talanoa* is *about* something; it concerns village events, people, and standards for evaluation. Information is transmitted, even if individuals must know a great deal already to make sense of what they hear. Gossiping is also an event in itself, one in which relationships of solidarity and artful complicity are each time reproduced anew.

appendix

The following *talanoa* transcripts are intended for general readers rather than Indianists; diacritical markings have been omitted. Numbers in parentheses indicate the length of pauses in seconds; brackets indicate overlaps.

Transcript 1: *Talanoa* at Dharm Dutt's, 7 July 1980

- 1.1 R: HOYGAYA FAISALA?
Completed decision?
 Has a decision been reached?
- 1.2 DD: NAHI NAHI KUCH NAHI.
No no at all no.
 Not in the least.
 (1)
- 1.3 R: KAL RAHA KI KAHIA RAHA?
Yesterday was or when was?
 Was it yesterday or some other time?
 (1)
- 1.4 DD: KAL TO PRAYA RAM SENICER TO BATAYA RAHA NE? HAMLOG
Yesterday so Praya Ram Saturday so said had no? We
Praya Ram said Saturday yesterday, didn't he? Our . . .
 KE . . (1) . . TUMHE BATAYA RAHA BATAYA RAHA MORDAYA ME.
of . . (1) . . You said had said had cemetery in.
 You said he said it would be in the cemetery.
- 1.5 R: HA, HA, HA.
 Yes, yes, yes.

- 1.6 DD: HARDGAYA BOLE.
Changed says.
Says it was changed.
(4)
- 1.7 R: HARDGAYA?
Changed?
- 1.8 DD: TA BOLE HARDGAYA. . . .
So says changed. . . .
So says it was changed. . . .
TAB PRAYA RAM BOLE HAMLOG DUSRE AIDIA LAGAI BOLE DUSRE
So Praya Ram says we another idea propose says another
So Praya Ram says we'll propose another idea, says we'll propose
SKIM LAGAI AISE NAHI THIK HEI.
scheme propose this not good is.
another scheme; this one is no good.
- 1.9 R: HA.
Yes.
- 1.10 DD: BOLE BATAI DENA TUMHE NAHI AI NAHI HAMLOG HARDAI DEGA.
Says tell give you not come not we change will give.
Says to tell you not to come, that we will make a change.
- 1.11 R: OO.
Oh.
- 1.12 DD: TAB KAL HAM JANNO MALTAI- . . . U STIRING KAMITI
Then yesterday I think Multi- . . . that steering committee
Then, I think it was yesterday, the Multi-racial, no, the
MITING RAHA U RAJ KUBER KE GHAR PAR RAT ME.
meeting was that Raj Kuber of house at night in.
steering committee meeting was that night at Raj Kuber's.
- 1.13 R: OO.
Oh.
- 1.14 DD: BOLE PATA NAHI KIYA NISCAY KARO. KOI BOLE
Says knowledge not which decision make. Someone says
Says he has no idea which decision was made. Someone said
BYAS DEDIS.
Byas gave.
- 1.15 R: UM HUNH. KITNA?
Um hunh. How much?
- 1.16 DD: EK SAU PACAS.
One hundred and fifty.
- 1.17 R: PURA?
All?
- 1.18 DD: HA.
Yes.
- 1.19 R: KAMTI DETE TABO THIK RAHA.
Less give then fine was.
If he'd given less, it would have been fine.
- 1.20 DD: HA. TAB PHIR RAJ DHAN KE LADKA AI RAHA HAM JANNO KAPHI
Yes. Then again Raj Dhan of son come had I know plenty
Yes. Then again I've heard that Raj Dhan's son came and gave
GARMI-GARMI KARIS USE.
hot-hot did to him.
him a hot time about it.
- 1.21 R: HA.
Yes.
- 1.22 DD: BOLE TUM KAHAI DEDIU?
Says you why given?
Says why had you given?

- 1.23 R: HA.
Yes.
- 1.24 DD: KAHİ DEDIU BOLE HAM BATAYA RAHA NAHI DENE. . . . EK DEDIS TO DEKH
Why given says I said had not give. . . . One gave so look
Why did you give? I said not to give . . . One has given, now
PARI SAB KE LAGBAG . . . (4) . . TO HARI PRATAP KALAYA RAHA TO BOLE
must all similar . . . (4) . . So Hari Pratap gone had so says
all must do so . . (4) . . So Hari Pratap went over there and says
RAJ DHAN WALLA TO NAHI DE MANGE.
Raj Dhan folks so not give want.
that Raj Dhan's family did not want to give.
- 1.25 R: HA.
Yes.
- 1.26 DD: BOLE KAMTI DIEGA. HAM BOLA KI JO GAYA RAHIN INKE
Says less will give. I said that who gone had he
Says I'll give less. I said that whoever had gone must,
CHAHİYE MITING BATORKE JANTA SE BATAU KI HAMLOGİN
must meeting called people from tell that we
having called a meeting, tell people that we
GAYA RAHA JARUR LEKİN PAISE UTNE NAHI MILA.
gone had certainly but money that much not available.
certainly went, but we did not make as much money as we hoped.
HAMLOG NAHI SAKIT HEI ETNA DIU EK SAU DE
We not able are that much give one hundred give
We cannot give that much. Some can give one
SAKIT HAI YA PACASSI DE SAKIT HOI NA? . . . DUI CAR ADMI
able are or eighty-five give able are no? . . . Two four men
hundred, some eighty-five, okay? A few men
PAGALA HEI SAB PURA NAHI PAGALE HEI. HAM JANNO KOI TO
crazy are all totally not mad are. I know some so
are crazy but not everyone's that way. I know several who
BATAYA TO THİK HEI.
said so fine is.
said it would be fine.
- 1.27 R: NAHI KAMTI ME TO RAJİ HOI JATE.
Not less in so agreement be goes.
If it's not less, people will be in agreement.
- 1.28 DD: HA.
Yes.
- 1.29 R: PACASSI DOLAR NE BHAİYE?
Eighty-five dollars no brother?
Eighty-five dollars would be all right, brother?
- 1.30 DD: HA. KUCH DE DETE NAHI?
Yes. Whoever bit give gives no?
Yes. Whoever gives a bit is giving, no?
- 1.31 R: SACHE BAT.
True words.
- 1.32 DD: PATA NAHI KAİSE MAMALA HEI. ABHI KUCH PATA NAHI
Knowledge not what sort fight is. Now some idea not
I don't know what the trouble's all about. Now I don't know
LAGA KA FAISALA BAYE KAL. NOTIS TO MILA HEI
take if decision was yesterday. Notice so available is
if a decision was made yesterday. There's been notice, so
İNKE JALDI PAISE BHAR DIU JALDI SE JALDI.
to them quick money pay give quick from quick.
they should pay the money quite quickly.

- 1.33 R: SACHE BAT . . (2) . . LEKIN APAS ME BATWAI KE AUR KAMTI HOI
True words . . (2) . . But own on tell of other less is
 True enough . . (2) . . But one told the other less than he was
 SAKATA RAHA. KAMTI KAREK TO BOLET RAHA.
able was. Less having done so said had.
 able. He did less than he said he had.
- 1.34 DD: HA. ULOG DUNO PAGALE HEIN. LAL DUTT TO GAON KE PAGALA
Yes. They two crazy are. Lal Dutt so village of crazy
 Yes. Those two are madmen. Lal Dutt is the craziest one
 HAI YE HEI USKE KOI TANG NAHI HEI KAISE KAREK CHAHIYE.
is is his at all idea not is how done must.
 in the village and has no idea at all how things should be done.
 AUR U JON HEI ULOG PAGALE HEI. LAL DUTT ULTA BAT
And he who is they crazy are. Lal Dutt backwards talk
 And those other folks are mad! Lal Dutt has been talking
 BATAWE TO ULOGIN KE CHAHIYE MITING BALAU. YA KOI KAMITI
spoke so they of must meeting call. Some committee
 nonsense, so they must call a meeting. Some committee,
 SANATAN DHARM KAMITI YA STIRING KAMITI UNKA BOLAI LIYE.
Sanatan Dharm committee or steering committee them call take.
 whether the Sanatani or steering committee, call them.
 TA KOI KAMITI BATAI DE KI AISE AISE BAT
Then some committee tell give that this way this way affair
 Then they can tell some committee what the nature of the
 HEI. YA RASTE KAMITI RUPAN PRADHAN HEI UNKE BALAU
is. Or road committee Rupan chair is him call
 problem is. Or call the road committee—Rupan is the chair—
 KI HAMLOG DE MANGE HEI JARUR AISE AISE
that we give want are certainly this way this way
 say we certainly want to give, that Lal Dutt made us
 LAL DUTT SAIN KARAI RAHA AUR BATAYA RAHA KI TUMLOGIN
Lal Dutt sign cause had and said had that you
 sign things this way, that he made us sign saying
 SAIN KAR DIU JITNA DE DENA. TO SAKIT RAHA KUCH
sign make give how much give give. So can was somewhat
 how much we would give. So it could be somewhat
 SUDHAR HO NAHI. LEKIN ULOGIN KUCH NAHI KARE. IDHARSE
simple is not. But they at all not did. From here
 simple, no? But they did nothing at all. Just running
 UDHAR DORE HE JUTE-PHUTE, KOI ACHA TANG SE KAM NE
there run is lying, at all good idea from work not
 around wildly, lying, doing nothing profitable,
 KARE NAHI. TAB E TO ETNA GARBARI . . (1) . . RUPAN NE BATATE
did not. Then e so much trouble . . (1) . . Rupan ne said
 thoughtless. And from that so much grief. . . . Rupan could say,
 KI DEKHO AISE AISE BAT HEI HAMLOG MANGIT HEI
that look this way this way issue is we want are
 look, this is how things are—we want to give
 PAISE DEGA LEKIN PAISA MANGE PURA BADA RASTA ME
money will give but money want all big road on
 money but want to make sure it is all used for the main
 LAGE SAB.
placed all.
 village road.
- 1.35 R: HA.
 Yes.

- 1.36 DD: YA NAHI DETE WE ME DETE BOLTE SAB KI HAMLOG PACAS PACAS.
Or not give it in give said all that we fifty fifty
 Or if not giving as much as they agreed, at least to say
 DEGA.
will give.
 they'd give fifty dollars.
- 1.37 R: UM-HMH.
 Um-hmh.
- 1.38 DD: TODA ADMI KE KAM ME AWA AUR HAMLOG JADA UNNATI
Few men of work in come and we great improvement
 Help has come from only a few men's work; we haven't made
 NAHI KAR PAWA. UTNA PAISA KAMAI NAHI PAWA
not make able. That much money raise not able
 a great improvement. We haven't raised much money,
 KALI CHE SAT AT SAU. LAW A OMAN SE DUI SAU
only six seven eight hundred. Take it from two hundred
 only six to eight hundred. Take two hundred dollars from
 DOLAR RASTAM DEDE TO HAMAR BHAKI KA. TAB KOI
dollar road give so our remaining of. Then some
 that, give it to the road; we'll keep the rest. Then there'd
 FAISALA HOI LEKIN ILOGIN PATA NAHI KAISE ULTA-PHULTA
decision is but they idea not how upside-down
 be some decision, but they don't know what they're doing,
 GARBARIYANI HEI IDHARSE UDHAR KARE HEI.
mixed-up is from here there do are.
 just getting everything mixed-up.
- 1.39 R: UM-HUNH . . (3) . . KHUSI ULOGINKE . . (1) . . TANG SE BAT
Um-hunh . . (3) . . pleasure theirs . . (1) . . sense from issue
 Um-hunh . . (3) . . It's their choice . . (1) . . It would be nice
 KARTE TO THIK RAHE.
make so fine would be.
 to make some sense out of all of this.
- 1.40 DD: ETNA MAMALA NAHI HOTI. . . .
This much trouble not have been. . . .
 There need not have been all this trouble. . . .

Transcript 2: *Talanoa* at Sham Narayan's, 3 July 1980

- 2.1 HN: TA U BAT . . (3) . . EE VAJRA DEO KAL CHATAK
So that issue . . (3) . . Ee Vajra Deo yesterday occasion
 What about that? . . . Ee Vajra Deo really made a great
 KARDIYA RAHA.
created had.
 stir yesterday.
- 2.2 DD: HAM SUNA UPAR SABERE WAHA TAK
I heard there in the morning there to
 I heard this morning they had gone as far
- 2.3 HN:
- GAYA RAHA.
went had.
 as that place.

AJ POLIS-ULIS
Today police
 Today the police
- AIN. . . . FASI LAGAI RAHA. BOLE DUNU PIET RAHIN.
came. . . . Noose fastened had. Says both drinking were.
 came. . . . He'd tied a noose. Says both were drinking.
 BOLE PIET RAHIN ISE TODA JADA RAT HOGAYA RAHI.
Says drinking were so a bit late night become had.
 Says they were drinking, and so it became late at night.

- 2.4 DD: NAU BAJE LAGBAG
Nine o'clock approximately
 About nine o'clock.
- 2.5 HN:
- 2.6 DD: DUNU KAT PIN.
 Both totally drunk.
- 2.7 HN: BOLE DUNU PIN KAT BOLE BAS DONO LARAIN BOLE
Says both drunk fully says enough both fought says
 Says both were quite drunk; says they fought with each other;
 PRAYA RAM BOLE BHAG JAO KADERIS BOLE GAYE RASI LEKE
Praya Ram says away go chased says went rope taking
 says Praya Ram says scam and chased them; they went taking
 CHADKE JAMUN PED PE FASI LAGAO. CHOTU BOLE SAB GHARAWE
went jamun tree on noose fastened. Chotu says all house in
 a rope and tied a noose on the jamun tree. Chotu says all were
 CHOTKANA JAI BOLE BAPA LOTIO JAB CHOTKANA
little fellow go says father returned when little fellow
 at home, and the little guy says father is back; the little
 GAI BOLE LEKE CHURI RAPETIS CHOTKANA TO BHAGA GHAR
went says taking knife chased little fellow so fled house
 guy left; says he took a knife and chased the little guy so
 E. CHOTKANA RAPETIS TO BHAGA CHAR E.
from. Little fellow chased so fled house from.
 he fled the house. He chased the little guy so he fled.
 U DARWAWAT RAHA. BAS SAB RONA PITNA BOLE EK
He terrified was. Enough all crying drinking says one
 He was terrified. So everyone was crying, drinking. Says
 TARAF SE CHILAI ROWAI KALI YAHA BIKARI GHAR LE ROYE
side from shout cry only there Bikari house at crying
 from that side there was nothing but crying and shouting;
 SUNAI.
was heard.
 they heard it as far away as Bikari's.
- 2.8 DD: LONDE BOLE TIS JANNE HAMLOG GAWA.
Children says thirty people we went.
 The children said more than thirty people went there.
- 2.9 HN: HA BAHUT BOLE TIS JANNE KOI GAYE TIS RAHA BOLE
Yes many says thirty people who went thirty were says
 Yes, many people, says, says thirty, says thirty or
 TIS BATIS JANNE KE BOLAT RAHA GAYE BOLE.
thirty thirty-two people of said had went says.
 thirty-two people, he said, went there, says.
- 2.10 SN: BOLE GAYE HUAN KUCH PONC GAYEN KUCH DEVIDINLOG
Says gone had some arrived went some Devidin's folks
 Says some had arrived as far as Devidin's house.
 KE GHAR LE. KUCH NARA TALAK GAYE BIKARI KE GHAR KE
of house to. Some ditch to went Bikari of house of
 Some got as far as the ditch, some only as
 KOI DUI LADKE GAYE RAHA TALAK KALI. KUCH FIR LOTAIN.
some two boys gone had to only. Some again returned.
 far as Bikari's house. Some went back home.
- 2.11 DD: BOLE HUWA JATJAT BATI KALAS BHUT GAYE. BOLE SAB
Says there going lanterns finished off went. Says all
 Says that as they were going there the lights went out.
 SOYGAYA KALAS. PONCAT PONCAT.
gone to sleep finished. Arriving arriving.
 Says all had gone to sleep. Just as they were arriving.

- 2.12 HN: HA. BOLE EKDUM GHAR ME SAKIT BOLE
Yes. Says immediately house at arrived says
Yes. Says that just as soon as they got to the house, says
 VAJRA DEO NIKALGAYA.
Vajra Deo came out.
Vajra Deo came out.
 BOLE POLIS. . . .
says police. . . .
- 2.13 DD: HA, TO. . . .
Yes, then. . . .
- 2.14 HN: AYA RAHIN DIN ME BOLE ADMIOLOG SOCIN BOLE PRAYA RAM
Come had day in says men thought says Praya Ram
The police came today. Says people thought, says Praya Ram
 NAHI RAHIT TO AUR JANNELOG SOCE RAHIN BOLE KI KAHE
not was so and people thought had says that told
wasn't there, and people thought, says, that he'd
 ETNA GAON KE NI ETNA DOR KE GAYE RAHIN JANTA.
such village of in such run of gone had know.
never heard of such running around in a village.
- 2.15 DD: KON KON MAMALA RAHA?
What what trouble was?
What was it all about?
- 2.16 HN: HA. BOLE ILOG KE BOLE U KAR
Yes. Says they of says he done
Yes. Says of them, says he did
 DIN ILOG DOR KI GAYIN TO DEKHIN PRAYA RAM APNE GAYA.
had they run of went so saw Praya Ram self went.
something. They fled running so he saw Praya Ram himself go.
- 2.17 DD: PRAYA RAM BATIS. . . .
Praya Ram said. . . .
- 2.18 HN: BIKARI BOLET RAHA.
Bikari said had.
Bikari had said.
- 2.19 DD: BOLE BAHUT GUSSAN BOLAT RAHA TUMLOG CELLE JAO BOLE.
Says very angry said had you(pl) leave go says.
Says he said, very angrily, for them to leave at once.
 BOLE FIR ROHIT RAHA PRAYA RAM BOLE KA KARI. . . . U
says again cried had Praya Ram says what doing. . . . He
Says they cried again; Praya Ram says what are you doing?
 BATAWAT RAHA BESWA GAYA RAHA BOLE LATCHMI UDHAR SE AWE
said had Beswa gone had says Latchmi there from came
He said Beswa had gone; says Latchmi had not come from
 NAHI.
not.
over there.
- 2.20 HN: HA.
Yes.
- 2.21 DD: BOLE CELLE JAO NAHI TO CHURI-URI MAR DI BOLE EKDUM
Says leave go not then knife hit give says totally
Says leave at once or I'll hit you with my knife. Says
 PAGALEN HEI NAHI?
crazy are not?
they're totally mad, aren't they?
- 2.22 HN: HA.
Yes.

- 2.23 DD: BOLE HAMLOG NAHI MANA AUR AGHE GAWA TO PRAYA RAM
Says we not believe and forward went so Praya Ram
 Says we didn't believe him and went on. So Praya Ram
 NIKALA BOLE KAMAR KE PICE JAGARA BAYE. KAMARWALA
came out says blanket of after fight was. Blanket about
 emerged, says the fight was about a blanket. The whole
 BAT RAHA.
issue was.
 thing was over a blanket.
- 2.24 HN: HAMLOG KE VISCAY KUCH NAHI MALUM. KALI I BAT BOLE
We of topic at all no idea. Only this issue says
 We had no idea about that topic. All we knew was that
- KI DHARU PIN ETNA. . . .
that whiskey drunk this much. . . .
 they had drunk so much whiskey. . . .
- 2.25 DD: EE U DHAN RAKHAIN NAHI?
Ee they rice put away not?
 Ee, they were storing threshed rice, right?
- 2.26 HN: HA.
 Yes.
- 2.27 DD: KAMAR MAILAI GAYA RAHA HAM JANNO
Blanket dirtied gone had I know.
 They got the blanket dirty in the process, I know.
- 2.28 HN: HA.
 Yes.
- 2.29 DD: VAJRA DEO BATAYA RAHA DHOHI DENA KUN CIS KAR DENA
Vajra Deo said had wash give some thing do give
 Vajra Deo had told them to wash it or do something with
 PATEL KE RAHA. TO DHOHE NAHI TO ADHEK TAIM BAYE TO
Patel of was. So washed not so covering-up time was so
 it. It was the boss's. So it wasn't washed and when it was
 HAM JANNO BAS. . . . BOLE KAHI NAHI DHOHIN TO CELLA
I know enough. . . . Says why not washed so proceeded
 time to go to bed that was all. . . . Says why didn't you wash
 BAT.
issue.
 it, and things got started.
- 2.30 HN: HAI, HAI, KOI VISCAY WAHI TO. . . .
Yes, yes, some topic that so. . . .
 Yes, yes, something like that. . . .
- 2.31 DD: EK DUM SARA BAT. LAD PADE BOLE DHARU PIS.
Totally shameful issue. To carry on says whiskey drunk.
 What a shameful affair! To carry on like that while drunk!

notes

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¹ *Talanoa* is one of the relatively few loan words taken into Fiji Hindi from Fijian. In Fijian it means general conversation rather than gossip per se. Its use in Fiji Hindi carries some connotation of idle chatter, sustaining the Fiji Indian stereotype of Fijians as given to pointless socializing. That it is a loan word suggests, as I explore in detail later, that this form of discourse is a development in Fiji rather than an importation from India.

² *Fakutiya* is a particularly rich term in Fiji Hindi; it implies silliness, worthlessness, sloth, immorality, and eristic behavior generally.

³ Bhatgaon villagers themselves make a clear distinction between *kara* ("hard") or *sita* ("straight") talk and *shudh* ("sweet") talk which is parallel to my distinction between direct and indirect discourse; only on certain infrequent occasions would the usual village man speak "straight."

"Indirection" as communicative style has yet to be defined in such a way that the controlled cross-cultural study of it can be carried out. Various strategies of indirection, however, are strikingly associated with egalitarian social relations (see, e.g., Atkinson 1984; Rosaldo 1973; Strathern 1975; McKellin 1984; Myers and Brenneis 1984). Specific motives for indirection remain quite variable. In the Pacific communities discussed in the articles cited above, for example, indirection serves to preclude further conflict, while in the well-known Black American speech strategy called "signifying" the intent may be "bringing about future confrontation through indirection" (M. Goodwin 1982:800; see also Mitchell-Kernan 1972).

⁴ Speakers with political motives frequently cue their listeners to the possibility of second meanings through the use of a range of keying devices, notable among them the "coy reference," the use of relative clauses with indefinite antecedents (discussed in detail in Brenneis 1978).

⁵ Other genres in the village, for example *katha* ("sacred narratives") and *dristant* (religious exempla), come much closer to meeting the Labov and Waletzky (1967) criteria. *Talanoa* differs not only from scholarly definitions of narrative but from other folk genres within the village as well.

⁶ I am indebted to Ronald Macaulay for suggesting that given this salient characteristic, *talanoa* be referred to as "shooting the *bole*."

⁷ Conversational analysts such as Schegloff (1982) and C. Goodwin (1981) argue convincingly that ordinary talk is a shared achievement, one in which participants attend constantly to a range of formal ordering and cueing devices. Their argument arises from a programmatic position that conversation is a coordinated exchange between individual speakers; from that point of view conversation is best seen as joint accomplishment. While *talanoa* can be characterized in terms of such conversational organization, any focus on the individual speaker would obscure one of its central features, that it is an instance of copformance, rather than a merely cooperative one. *Talanoa* is an emergent performance, not a formulaic one. Burns (1980) and Watson-Gegeo and Boggs (1977) discuss somewhat similar examples of the copformance of narratives.

⁸ This observation draws in part on Ochs's (1979) suggestion that linguistic forms characteristic of speech during childhood remain in the repertoire of adults and are used in certain situations. Ochs is concerned primarily with morphosyntactic forms, while I focus on discourse structure.

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