

The Oral and Beyond



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With her 1976 book "Oral Literature in Africa," Ruth Finnegan almost single-handedly created the field of ethnography of language. Now, Finnegan has gathered and updated a selection of her best work on oral literature, performance, and the creative use of language in Africa, along with several new essays that broaden and extend her ideas. "The Oral and Beyond" looks simultaneously backwards and forwards, reviewing and critiquing the achievements of scholarship on African oral literature, revisiting issues of perennial contention, and highlighting some of the most interesting new ideas and approaches in the field. Exploring such fundamental questions as how texts and textuality relate to performance, how ideology inflects language, and how traditional forms adapt to modern media and popular culture, Finnegan essentially crafts an intellectual history of her field. At the same time, she propels the ethnography of language forward, bringing the techniques and knowledge developed through her fieldwork in Africa to bear on issues that transcend African studies and reach into the larger world of anthropology and beyond.

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