



# Where is Language?: An Anthropologist's Questions on Language, Literature and Performance

*Ruth Finnegan*

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Language is central to human experience and our understanding of who we are, whether written or unwritten, sung or spoken. But what is language and how do we record it? Where does it reside? Does it exist and evolve within written sources, in performance, in the mind or in speech?

For too long, ethnographic, aesthetic and sociolinguistic studies of language have remained apart from analyses emerging from traditions such as literature and performance. *Where is Language?* argues for a more complex and contextualized understanding of language across this range of disciplines, engaging with key issues, including orality, literacy, narrative, ideology, performance and the human communities in which these take place.

Eminent anthropologist Ruth Finnegan draws together a lifetime of ethnographic case studies, reading and personal commentary to explore the roles and nature of language in cultures across the world, from West Africa to the South Pacific. By combining research and reflections, Finnegan discusses the multi-modality of language to provide an account not simply of vocabulary and grammar, but one which questions the importance of cultural settings and the essence of human communication itself.

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