



Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Communication

By Ruth Finnegan

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Many accounts of human communication suggest that we are limited to communicating through words, visual images, the mass media and by digital means. This perspective underestimates the multisensory qualities of much of our human interconnecting and the multiple sounds, touches, sights and material objects which humans use so creatively to interconnect both nearby and across space and time.

Ruth Finnegan brings together research from linguistic and sensory anthropology, alternative approaches to 'material culture' and 'the body', non-verbal communication, cultural studies, computer-mediated communication, and illuminating work on animal communication. Examples from both western and non-western cultures together with plentiful illustrations enrich and deepen the analysis.

The book uncovers the amazing array of sounds, sights, smells, gestures, looks, movements, touches and material objects which humans use so creatively to interconnect both nearby and across space and time - resources consistently underestimated in those western ideologies that prioritise 'rationality' and referential language.

Focussing on embodied and material processes, and on practice rather than text, this comparative analysis challenges the underlying cognitive and word-centred model common to many approaches to communication.

The second edition of *Communicating* includes a new introduction, updates to take account of recent work, an additional chapter covering ethereal non-verbal

non-bodily communicating such as telepathy and dreams, fresh illustrations, a new conclusion and updated bibliography.

This authoritative but accessible book is an essential transdisciplinary overview for researchers and advanced students in language and communication, anthropology and cultural studies.

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Editorial Review

Review

Readers Favorite 5 stars

Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Communication by Ruth Finnegan is a pioneering work in the art of communication, a work that is filled with information that will surprise the majority of readers. In a masterful way, Finnegan explores the subtleties of language and communication, going beyond the traditional methods of communication to demonstrate that there are multiple layers of intelligence that allow both humans and animals to interconnect and communicate with each other. The work draws strength from seemingly long years of research into history, traditions, cultures, literature, and anthropology. Finnegan lifts the veil of mystery from the diverse universes and channels of communication that can be found beyond the use of words, sounds, and visual images, to reveal non-verbal and beyond-the-body modes of communication that are stunning.

Ruth Finnegan's *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Communication* is one of those rare books that will assist linguistic students and students of social anthropology as a splendid reference book, and it will most certainly help anyone to enhance their communication skills and to develop the acute sense of receiving non-verbal messages from anyone. Through dint of research, the author demonstrates that communication can become even easier if we hone the vast array of communication channels that are available to us.

Finnegan has so skillfully established herself as an expert in the art of communication, offering readers a work that is as rich and educative as it communication, offering readers a work that is as rich and educative as it is entertaining. Her expression is simple and she uses many examples to pass her message across. Beautifully written, laced with surprising facts, this book will help anyone who wants to deepen their communication skills and anyone who wants to easily reach out and connect with others. Finnegan seems to be set on restoring the lost art of communication and is not just a wonderful researcher; she has the gift of putting into words what can be very difficult to understand. This book will enrich the lives of many people.

Ruth Finnegan's *Communicating* covers the anthropology of communication in multiple aspects, situations, and modes. Its scope is large, and perhaps that is the message of the book, that human communication is difficult to describe and certainly not to be relegated to a binary choice of oral versus literate. Finnegan pushes the reader to think of communication as involving our five senses, as moving into an ethereal realm, and as crossing geographic distance and time. Finnegan relies on her broad and rich grounding in anthropology and combines this with brilliant and thought-provoking insights from other fields of study.

The first chapter is for the most part a theoretical discussion of communication. Finnegan presents various theories of communication, most of them focused on verbal and linguistic models. She cites

Bakhtin (1986:68-70) in stressing the interlocutor in communicative events (16), and notes that cultural variability must be recognized when researching such communicative processes (25).

Finnegan notes the shortcomings of the evolutionary model of communication that places a literate society at the apex. This is a significant move, given the tendency to emphasize a distinction between literate and oral societies. The reality is that communication within societies is multimodal, a theme elaborated throughout this book. Finnegan describes communication as "a dynamic interactive process made up of the organized, purposive, mutually influential and mutually recognizable actions and experiences that are created in a variety of modes by and between active participants as they interconnect with each other" (28-29). Moreover, for Finnegan, communication is a "bundle of features, themselves graduated rather than absolute" (29).

The second chapter briefly addresses the question of how humans are able to communicate. Finnegan traces communication through our five bodily senses. She further discusses non-verbal communication, citing Judee Burgoon and Laura Guerrero's 1994 book, *Nonverbal Communication*, with its study of seven non-verbal modes of expression, noting that such variety in expression prevents broad generalizations (37).

Chapter 3 explores the auditory aspect of communication, the world of sound. Sound is paramount in linguistic studies, since identifying phonemes for a language is instrumental in establishing a written orthography and literature. However, not all sound is routinely noted in a communicative event. Sound is often treated as a background feature in the performance of a story, yet it alters our moods and creates a pulse or beat to all discourse, be it poetic or conversational. Sound can be an emotive feature that betrays or gives credence to our speech.

Yet, it is sight that is so significant in communication that Finnegan takes two chapters to discuss it. Seeing people in their communicative action adds much insight into what they are trying to say or not say. We read people's faces and their body language. The visual is closely intertwined with the spoken. Storytellers visually engage their audiences, hoping that they will watch and see what they are trying to communicate. As Finnegan argues, "For something to communicate visually it must also be seen" (94). Hence, the storyteller or performer must make gestures on a big enough scale for the audience to perceive them. Art, of course, is also a communicative mode. Thus, early churches relied on art to convey stories from the Bible. Finnegan includes some great examples of art throughout the book, showing how art communicates visually to its viewers; one notable instance is her discussion of Ferdinand Hodler's

"Study of the Disappointed Souls" (102). As Finnegan notes, sign languages and standardized gestures in various occupations are also ways humans visually communicate with one another. Finnegan discusses body art as a means of communication, whether through tattooing, body paint, scarring, hair styles, ornaments, or clothing. These adornments communicate specifically within a culture. People communicate status, convey protest, express identity, and reveal fashion through such visual adornments (or lack thereof).

Chapter 5 discusses human arts and artifacts. This is a fascinating chapter that examines how cultures use various arts to communicate events and stories to be passed to future generations. Religious symbols, pictographs, sand art, tanning, sculpture, and paintings are but some of the many resources people have used to communicate their traditions. Finnegan concludes this section by warning the reader not to elevate one form of communication over another.

Chapter 6 discusses communication achieved through odor, or smell. Animals employ odor to communicate, especially to demarcate territory and attract partners. People often associate events and memories with smells. Religious events often include scents, such as incense sticks in Hindu temples, Anglican priests swinging incense, or beeswax candles in a Moravian Christmas service. Finnegan notes that, "Smell furthermore seems to take us into the inner nature of things, beyond the superficial surfaces that can be captured by vision" (192).

Chapter 7 explores communication through touch, often a sensitive matter in cross-cultural situations. Not touching someone could show respect in one culture, or coldness in another. In the US it is generally appropriate to shake hands, and not to do so could show disdain, resentment, or some negative emotion. In the South Pacific, touching a respected stranger is to gain power from them.

Perhaps the most unusual part of this book is to be found in chapter 8, which deals with communicating through the ether. Finnegan writes about the spirit and dream worlds, discounted in some circles, but very much a part of reality in others. She discusses near-death accounts, dreams, and remote communication between twins, all of which lie outside the immediate observable world. Sacred literature is full of this type of communicative event, for example, Joseph and Mary being warned in a dream to flee to Egypt, and the several dreams of Joseph in Genesis.

In chapter 9 Finnegan discusses communication as a mix of the arts. Documenting communication is not restricted to its audio, visual, or textual components, but entails attending to the whole of the event. When we communicate something important, we normally use multiple modes to ensure the message is understood. Here Finnegan invokes the concept of intertextuality, whereby people are "creating their own

meaning, at least in part, through the associations they themselves bring to their interpretations" (255). However, Finnegan prefers the term "overtonalities" to intertextuality because of the verbal focus of the latter term. Music is also a mix of arts, often with verbal, visual, auditory, and in some instances, tactile elements. Finnegan states that the "deepest human communion is through sharing music" (235).

Chapter 10 discusses communication through space and time. Communities have ways of communicating events and stories through many generations. They also have ways of communicating over geographic distance, whether digitally (nowadays) or through means like smoke signals, whistle language, yodeling, and calling out, among others.

In sum, communication, for Finnegan, is dynamic, evolving, imaginative, evocative, and a multiplex system of human behavior, cognition, and culture. *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Communication* is a rich exploration of this variegated domain. James Stahl, Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, Journal of folklore Research

About the Author

Ruth Finnegan is Emeritus and Visiting Research Professor in Sociology at The Open University, UK. Her previous publications include *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), *Oral Poetry* (1977/1992), *Information Technology* (1987), *Literacy and Orality* (1988), *The Hidden Musicians* (1989), *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* (1992), *South Pacific Oral Traditions* (1995), and *Tales of the City* (1998).

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