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978-1-107-02639-1 - The Anthropology of Intentions: Language in a World of Others

Alessandro Duranti

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The Anthropology of Intentions

How and to what extent do people take into account the intentions of others? Alessandro Duranti sets out to answer this question, showing that the role of intentions in human interaction is variable across cultures and contexts.

Through careful analysis of data collected over three decades in US and Pacific societies, Duranti demonstrates that, in some communities, social actors avoid intentional discourse, focusing on the consequences of actions rather than on their alleged original goals. In other cases, he argues, people do speculate about their own intentions or guess the intentions of others, including in some societies where it was previously assumed they avoid doing so. To account for such variation, Duranti proposes an “intentional continuum,” a concept that draws from phenomenology and the detailed analysis of face-to-face interaction.

A combination of new essays and classic re-evaluations, the book draws together findings from anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy to offer a penetrating account of the role of intentions in defining human action.

ALESSANDRO DURANTI is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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however, the Samoan utterances and their translations that you will find in this book are my responsibility. I have done my best to be faithful to what people said and how they have said it in the recordings. And I have tried to incorporate as much as possible of the cultural glosses that the people of Falefā or Samoans in the US offered while listening to the recordings with me or on their own. But any linguistic token is always open to yet another interpretation and I am sure that even more variants from those I heard are possible in both the transcription and the translation offered in this book. Since all of the original data presented here are now digitized as either audio or video files, it might be possible for others in the future to continue where I have left off in the interpretive process.

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