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*The Gate of Words* is the first extensive ethnographic study of ritual language in Korean shamanism studies that examines language use in its immediate ritual context. Although Korean shamanism has been extensively studied by myriad scholars from different perspectives and disciplines, communicative aspects of *kut* (shamanic ritual)—the focal point of shamanic practice—rarely has been explored. In this regard, Antonetta L. Bruno makes a strong contribution to Korean shamanism studies, a core of Korean folkloristics.

Following the precedents of linguistic anthropology, especially speech act theory and the ethnography of speaking, Bruno explores “what actually transpires during a ritual” by paying meticulous attention to a variety of languages. Based on Bruno’s several years of fieldwork in Korea, mostly Seoul and Incheon, and placing communication at the center of the study, this book investigates the interrelationship between different genres of ritual languages in their pragmatic and empirical dimensions, rather than “reconstruct[ing] an ideal text, literally abstracted from the actual setting of a concrete ritual” (148).

Particularly, Bruno delves into the three focal ritual genres: *muga* (shaman songs), *cheom* (divination), and *kongsu* (oracles), explicating their generic features. Unlike most previous studies that treated these genres as separate units, Bruno’s emphasizes their intertextual nature not only among these formal genres but also with informal speech by illustrating how they contextualize each other. For instance, she includes shamans’ informal dialogues with other shamans and their
clients as vital components that constitute ritual events, while illuminating how shamans solicit necessary information from their clients and how creatively they entextualize and de-/recontextualize the antecedent informal dialogue in a more formal setting. By so doing, Bruno enhances our understanding of how discourses are diachronically and dialogically shaped by and index other discourses, both prior and subsequent. Thus, micro-level history is embraced in her frame of reference.

As previous scholars have argued but not thoroughly investigated, although shamans play a key role in ritual performances, they are not the sole actors. Bruno demonstrates how the rituals are constituted by interactions among shamans, beneficiaries, spirits/gods, and other spectators in rituals, emphasizing the agency of multiple participants and the processes of their interaction. This is another successful innovation of her study. She includes nonverbal communicative means such as physical, visual, and musical elements, which have drawn the increasing attention of folklorists and anthropologists focusing on verbal arts and oral traditions. Including these nonverbal elements helps the reader grasp participants' interactions in more detail and makes the ethnography fuller and more vivid.

In dealing with this complicated dimension of speech interaction, however, Bruno maintains the dichotomy of speaker (addressor)/listener (addressee) that has lost its currency in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and adjacent fields. This dichotomy is rather too simplistic to describe the multilayered ritual discourse and shamans' competence in changing their fleeting enactment roles. Erving Goffman's notions of "participation framework" and "participation status," for instance, would have been useful in dealing with subtle shifts of shamans' multiple roles. In order to highlight individual shaman performers' distinctive speech styles, Bruno compares two different shamans' linguistic ways. However, this comparison serves as an end in itself and makes the reader wonder about the possible causes for and implications of these differences.

Despite these pitfalls, Bruno's sophisticated analysis and interpretation throughout the book contribute to the conclusion that emotional transformation of the client participants, made possible
mainly by shamans' dexterous strategies of language use, is the key to ritual efficacy. This might be a clue that explains the continuous demand for shamanic rituals and divinations in highly modernized Korean society, the phenomenon she pointed out at the very beginning of her book. Is the emotional transformation during the shamanic rituals unique to Korean shamanism, then? Haven't the needs of clients and shamans also changed in response to their shifting interests? These questions are not intended to undermine her work but rather to encourage further investigation on these issues. Bruno's work on the complex body of Korean shamanism will bring a new light to Korean shamanism studies by enhancing our understanding of performative efficacy of ritual language and the agency of multiple participants.


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Elliott Oring's latest collection of essays, Engaging Humor, follows closely in the tradition of his earlier works Israeli Humor (1981), The Jokes of Sigmund Freud (1984), and Jokes and Their Relations (1992). While much of the territory covered in Engaging Humor will be familiar to his readers, Oring continues to develop his scholarly repertoire in fresh, interesting directions. In each of the ten essays on humor, he refines established themes (appropriate incongruity, absurdity in elephant jokes, Freud's relationship to Jewish jokes, dyadic traditions, national character, the failings of aggression theory) and explores previously un- or underdeveloped ideas (Freud's concept of "joke thoughts," the devaluation of sentiment, jokes as conversational glosses, overtly hostile humor, blond jokes, Internet communities).

Oring is a gifted scholar who, like Freud, is deeply concerned with the mechanics of humor. Oring is interested in why and how we