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Kathryn Napier Gray

*Written and Spoken Words
and Worlds: John Eliot's
Algonquian Translations*

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Kathryn Napier Gray

Written and Spoken Words and Worlds: John Eliot's Algonquian Translations

There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.
—Psal. 19.3. *The Indian Grammar Begun*, title page.

Recently, Edward S. Gray has suggested that, ‘missionaries found themselves with a task not unlike that of the modern semiotician: to identify and codify the range of spoken and unspoken strategies of communication available to themselves and to Indians.’¹ John Eliot was one of the first missionaries in North America to engage with issues surrounding spoken and unspoken strategies of communication and first began preaching in Algonquian in 1647.² It was, however, not until 1654 and the publication of his *Primer and Catechism*

1. Edward S. Gray, *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 29.

2. Contrary to previously held views, Cogley argues very strongly that Eliot began his linguistic training in 1646 and not 1643 as has been previously suggested. This confusion has occurred due to the account of Eliot's missionary work in *New England's First Fruits*, 1643. Cogley states: ‘Gookin and Winthrop, the only colonists who commented on the matter, reported that the Apostle started his linguistic training in 1646; Gookin added that Eliot began his study “not long after” the birth of the mission.’ James deNormandie is credited with the (mistaken) assertion that 1643 is the correct date. Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission To The Indians Before King Philip's War*. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 49. See: Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians*. Collections of the M.H.S. (Boston, 1792); James K. Hosmer (ed), *Winthrop's Journal* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908); James de Normandie, ‘John Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 5 (1912): 359.