

**From the reviews for [The Simian Tongue: The Long Debate about Animal Language](#)
(Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007)**

“[A] masterwork in the history of science.... In parts, *The Simian Tongue* reaches the status of a page-turner.... crackshot-accurate and absorbing.... It reminds us with stunning clarity that science is a spiral staircase: new techniques and theories emerge, not always in linear fashion, from the old. It shows, too, science’s power to shape ways we humans think of, and acts towards, our fellow creatures.” *Times Literary Supplement* (lead review)

“Radick traces the complex history of [the] ‘playback method’, its rise and fall, and then its resurrection in a lively and engaging manner for much of the book. . . . [B]ut what really sets it apart from most other histories of science is Radick’s larger aim of engaging nearly all the genres that have occupied historians of science for the last thirty years or so. As a result, we have not only a book framed or undergirded by the fate of a crucial methodology that exploited new recording technologies, we also have a skilful historical weaving of the relevant disciplines like anthropology, comparative psychology, and animal behaviour of ethology and research schools or schools of thought, led by charismatic personalities, along with their institutional and national settings. We have an exhaustive philosophical discussion of background language theories, beginning with the work of the nineteenth-century Sanskrit scholar F. Max Müller and ending with a technical explication of more recent studies of primate language. Radick explores conventional sources like publications, diaries, and correspondence but also includes newsprint, magazine, and other ephemera, eliminating the elite/popular view of science. Finally, we have a cast of characters that contains, in addition to the colorful [Richard] Garner, major historical figures like Franz Boas, Robert Yerkes, and Noam Chomsky, alongside Koko, Washoe, Nim Chimsky (Chomsky’s simian namesake), and the other animals who played vital roles in the history of language. What emerges in the end is a richly contextualized history that would have been unthinkable, let alone undoable, for a preceding generation of historians of science. In short, this is an important book whose comprehensive scope should set the standard for future histories of science.” *American Historical Review*

“Radick makes it his elegantly shouldered burden to explain the boom and bust (and ultimate boom) of this investigative tool. In exploring his technological *explanandum*, he takes us on a journey that impressively spans disciplines (from zoology to anthropology to linguistics) and locations (from the Bronx Zoo to Down House to the West African jungle) . . . Radick has stitched the documentary fragments together into a riveting narrative of science and scandal that still manages to extract important historical lessons . . . [In his conclusion] Radick really hits his explanatory stride. He offers lucid discussions of theoretical considerations (including technological determinism and counterfactual history) and ably demonstrates that much is to be gained from examining these developments across disciplines. The book is a delight to read and should be of considerable interest to historians of the human/animal boundary, animal behavior studies, evolutionary biology, comparative psychology, and anthropology.” *Isis*

“[An] instructive read for anyone interested in the language barrier, or absence thereof, between humans and other animals.... fascinating.” *Nature*

“[A] thorough account of the comparative study of language origins.... packed with information.... elegantly written.... Radick has certainly unearthed some fabulous gems from the archive.” *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*

“Gregory Radick’s ambitious book places [primate language] studies in an international scientific context and covers more than a century of debate. At this moment, when apes have recently been granted animal rights in Spain and other countries are likely to follow Spain’s example, the book is extremely timely, since its basic subject is the long argument about whether non-human primates share with us qualities of sensibility required for speech.... admirable.” *Journal of the History of Biology*

“[Here is] a history meticulously researched and referenced, a resource which future studies of the fate of evolutionary theories should take on board. It is also an extremely good historical narrative about the science of what links and what divides humans and animals, the boundary along which, so many people have thought, runs the wall of language..... The book is a fine accomplishment, accessible and well written, highly informative and reflectively structured around the ‘big question’ of language, a question as relevant to modern scientists as to historians of biology or the human sciences.... [The] vivacity as well as authority of the author’s voice makes for a very satisfying read.” *British Journal for the History of Science*

“Radick’s book offers a tremendously rich and stimulating compendium of the scientific approaches and personalities behind the ongoing study of language evolution.... *The Simian Tongue* should interest many within the biological and behavioral sciences, let alone anyone endowed with language and a curiosity about its origin.” *American Journal of Human Biology*

“The why and the how of the different fates for [Radick’s] protagonists makes fascinating reading and prompts additional reflection.... Radick has clearly researched the period and its characters thoroughly and, in some cases, had access to volumes of personal correspondence that reveal, in ways never before accessible even to contemporary specialists in the field, or possibly even to the characters themselves (!), the personal, cultural and professional factors that motivated their science. The result is a wholly novel and engaging account.” *International Journal of Primatology*

“Radick succeeds in showing the web of factors that led to the historical pattern of the playback experiment.... a very scholarly work..... Radick has mastered a remarkable range of subjects.” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*

“Radick’s fascinating intellectual history... is not only hugely informative and enjoyable, but it also highlights important philosophical and historical ideas about the nature of scientific method.... It will give readers a long view of this newly important debate.” *Quarterly Review of Biology*

“As a thoroughly researched, very well-written history of the development of the science of animal behaviour from just after Darwin to just before the present day the book is hard to beat.... Radick is a steady and balanced guide through the debates that have occupied ethology and comparative psychology.... Readers looking for a wide-ranging, erudite, often fascinating survey of the fields’ tumultuous history will get great pleasure from this book.” *Ethology*

“[R]adick’s much-welcome monograph recovers and adroitly lays bare the shifting evolutionary implications, institutional fortunes and intellectual capital of one of the most fascinating experimental paradigms in the history of science.... lucid and compelling.... *The Simian Tongue* is a ground-breaking work of interest to historians of science, animal studies scholars, and to everyone interested in the relationship between evolutionary ideology and the politics of language.” *British Society for Literature and Science website*

“How and why uses of the phonograph and related technologies... faded and were later resuscitated for research in primate communication makes fascinating reading and encompasses the rise and fall of entire disciplines.... Radick covers the issues and characters carefully, thoughtfully, and in the process affords us a glimpse of the personal, professional, and political factors that shaped their enterprises.... [E]xcellent.” *Evolutionary Anthropology*

“[A] thoughtful and gracefully written book.... [Radick] deals well with an enormous range of intellectual history from many diverse disciplines: biological and cultural anthropology, ethology, primatology, psychology, information theory, neuroscience, and linguistics. He displays a deep knowledge of the issues that have both united and divided the scientists who have worked in all these areas. He has, moreover, given us a very good read. I recommend the book warmly.” *Language*

“Providing a background rich with scientific intrigue, little-known facts, and painstakingly thorough explanations.... Radick’s new book delivers what it promises and more.” *Yale Scientific*

Winner of the 2010 Suzanne J. Levinson Prize of the History of Science Society for best book in the history of the life sciences and natural history