



# The Genesis of Grammar: A Reconstruction (Oxford Studies in the Evolution of Language)

By Bernd Heine, Tania Kuteva

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"This book reconstructs what the earliest grammars might have been and shows how they could have led to the languages of modern humankind.

"Like other biological phenomena, language cannot be fully understood without reference to its evolution, whether proven or hypothesized," wrote Talmy Givón in 2002. As the languages spoken 8,000 years ago were typologically much the same as they are today and as no direct evidence exists for languages before then, evolutionary linguists are at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in biology. Bernd Heine and Tania Kuteva seek to overcome this obstacle by combining grammaticalization theory, one of the main methods of historical linguistics, with work in animal communication and human evolution. The questions they address include: do the modern languages derive from one ancestral language or from more than one? What was the structure of language like when it first evolved? And how did the properties associated with modern human languages arise, in particular syntax and the recursive use of language structures? The authors proceed on the assumption that if language evolution is the result of language change then the reconstruction of the former can be explored by deploying the processes involved in the latter. Their measured arguments and crystal-clear exposition will appeal to all those interested in the evolution of language, from advanced undergraduates to linguists, cognitive scientists, human biologists, and archaeologists.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

Heine and Kuteva's *The Genesis of Grammar* is a major contribution to the rapidly burgeoning literature on the origins and evolution of human language. They draw on their decades of research on the phenomenon of grammaticalization to draw plausible conjectures about what the first human language might have looked like. I recommend this book to anyone looking for a fresh perspective on this challenging and fascinating problem. Frederick J. Newmeyer, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, University of Washington Heine and Kuteva's book is a wonderful, illuminating, exhaustive introduction to the subject of language evolution. It affords the reader a wide-ranging, comprehensive overview of the topic and relevant literature. It outlines the core issues, notes the perennial puzzles, and wades boldly into the bitter controversies that have dogged the discussion ever since its inception. Above all, the book reminds us that, however frustrating the topic may be, a true understanding of the phenomenon of language, and thus of human culture and cognition, is only possible within an evolutionary framework. Talmy Givon, Professor of Linguistics and Cognitive Science, University of Oregon

### **About the Author**

Bernd Heine is Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at the Institute of African Studies, University of Cologne. His 33 books include *Possession: Cognitive sources, forces, and grammaticalization* (C.U.P., 1997); *Auxiliaries: Cognitive Forces and Grammaticalization* (O.U.P., 1993); *Cognitive Foundations of Grammar* (U.S.A., 1997); with Derek Nurse, *African Languages: An Introduction* (C.U.P., 2000), *A Linguistic Geography of Africa* (C.U.P., to appear 2007). Tania Kuteva is Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Dusseldorf and author of *Auxiliation: An Enquiry into the Nature of Grammaticalization* (O.U.P., 2001). Bernd Heine and Tania Kuteva are the joint authors of *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* (C.U.P., 2002) and *Language Contact and Grammatical Change* (C.U.P., 2005), and *The Changing Languages of Europe* (O.U.P., 2006).

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