The genesis of grammar: a reconstruction
Authors: Bernd Heine and Tania Kuteva
Edition: First
Publisher: OUP
Pages: 418

Evolution, for a long time, was a dirty word in linguistics. However, since about a decade and a half evolutionary linguistics is sexy again. Having its finger on the pulse Oxford University Press started their 'Studies in the Evolution of Language' series 7 years ago. Bernd Heine and Tania Kuteva's *The genesis of grammar: a reconstruction* is the 9th book to appear in this series. It is to my mind also the best.

As the title suggests, Heine and Kuteva's focus is not on the emergence of language *per se* but on how it acquired grammar. Their approach is based on their considerable knowledge of 'grammaticalisation', that is the development of grammatical structures out of lexical material (such as the rise of the preposition *beside* out of the expression *by the side of*). Grammaticalisation theory has thus far only been used to explain changes in fully-fledged languages, called 'modern languages' by the authors. But when our ancestors started to talk, it's extremely unlikely that their language (which the authors call 'early language') had anything near a fully-fledged grammar. Instead, this must have evolved gradually. The authors use our understanding of grammaticalisation in modern languages to reconstruct the gradual development of grammar in early language. For example, since prepositions often arise out of nouns (recall that *side* in *by the side of* changed into *beside*) we may assume that nouns emerged in early language before prepositions. In fact, Heine and Kuteva suggest that nouns were the very first 'layer' of grammar. Verbs came later, and more grammatical elements like prepositions later still. The final layers to be added included even more grammatical items such as relative clause, case, and agreement markers. Thus, our ancestors moved from grunts lacking any specific meaning to single noun utterances such as *Bear!*, to expressions involving verbs and other, more grammatical elements, such as *There's a bear beside your house!*

Interdisciplinarity is very much *en vogue* these days. Because of the absence of direct linguistic evidence related to early language, many scholars take an interdisciplinary approach. There are some good examples of this around, but much of the work is actually more 'inter' than 'disciplinary': researchers often lack a solid or broad enough knowledge of one or all of disciplines they attempt to draw on. Heine and Kuteva's book is different, in that it's based almost exclusively on the *linguistic* theory of grammaticalisation. Ironically, this unfashionably narrow perspective comes as a breath of fresh air, and it shows that there is a place for good old-fashioned *disciplinarity* — even in areas where one might least expect it.

Who is it for? Anyone who wants to know how apes came to produce complex phrases like *anyone who wants to know.*
Presentation: Solid yet readable argumentation; the author index and references section should have been proofread more carefully.
Would you recommend it? A classic in the making.

Constituent structure
Author: Andrew Carnie
Edition: First
Publisher: OUP
Pages: 292

The cover states that this is an "ïdeal introduction" to constituency. It's ideal only if you like pondering over artificial examples like *anti anti missile missile missile*, or *I bought a basket of flowers with an Azalea in it with a large handle*. Not that you'd be alone in enjoying these examples: they are very much part of what mainstream formalist grammarians (roughly, Chomskians) base their theories on. Useful though Carnie's book is as an overview of Chomskian-style theorising, he completely glosses over alternative, functional-cognitive approaches that rely on aspects of real language use such as self-repair or sequentiality in discourse.

Who is it for? Soldiers of Noam Chomsky's Galactic Empire.
Presentation: Clear diagrams; too many typos; hopeless author index and references.
Would you recommend it? As a member of the functional-cognitive Rebel Alliance, I wouldn't.

Syntactic gradience: the nature of grammatical indeterminacy
Author: Bas Aarts
Edition: First
Publisher: OUP
Pages: 280

Last year, the journal *Studies in Language* featured an animated, and animating, exchange between Bas Aarts and the American linguist William Croft. Croft criticised Aarts's attempt to explain away apparent fuzziness between syntactic categories. Then and now, Aarts defends the essentially Aristotelian idea that categories have sharp boundaries, and the structuralist/Chomskian method of assigning words or constructions to categories, i.e. distributional criteria and "weighing up the evidence" if the criteria point in different directions. The book is well written and impressive in its coverage of literature and present-day English data. Deciding on the winner of Aristotle/Aarts vs. Croft should be a great exercise for students and professional linguists alike.

Who is it for? Grammar students who like to really stretch their brain.
Presentation: Excellent diagrams; the author index shows that OUP *can* get it right.
Would you recommend it? Yes, but read Croft as well to get the complete intellectual workout.

Language in the British isles
Editor: David Britain
Edition: Second
Publisher: CUP
Pages: 508

The second edition of the volume edited by Peter Trudgill 25 years ago, this book is so thoroughly revised that we may as well call it a new reference. And a reference book it is indeed: users will dip into it for a snapshot of standard or non-standard English spoken in Britain, other languages spoken here (Chinese gets its own chapter but Polish doesn't), or applied issues such as the status of non-standard English in education. The scope, then, is very ambitious. If the publisher intends this as a textbook that's actually a problem, as the chapters are too sketchy and too devoid of theory (linguistic and sociolinguistic) to be the backbone of a course in English Language or Sociolinguistics.

Who is it for? Students in need of an essay topic, lecturers in need of a list of essay topics.
Presentation: Good use of tables, maps and photos.
Would you recommend it? Get your university librarian to put a copy on short loan.

A history of the English language
Editors: David Denison and Richard Hogg
Edition: First
Publisher: CUP
Pages: 495

Having published the monumental six-volume *Cambridge History of the English Language* the editors and contributors sighed a breath of relief… then went on to produce this more affordable and student-friendly version. It goes through the history of English not by period but by topic. The topics are a good balance of structural aspects (such as phonology, morphology, and syntax) and language variation and use, not only in Britain but also in other parts of the world. The contributors are all leading figures in the field, and they all write as leading figures should. Quite a few histories of English are available, but this really is the best pound-for-pound contender out there.

Who is it for? Any history of English course that deals with structure, variation, and use, and doesn't shy away from theory.
Presentation: Carefully edited, with helpful suggestions for further reading.
Would you recommend it? Right now this isn't *a* but *the* history of the English language.

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