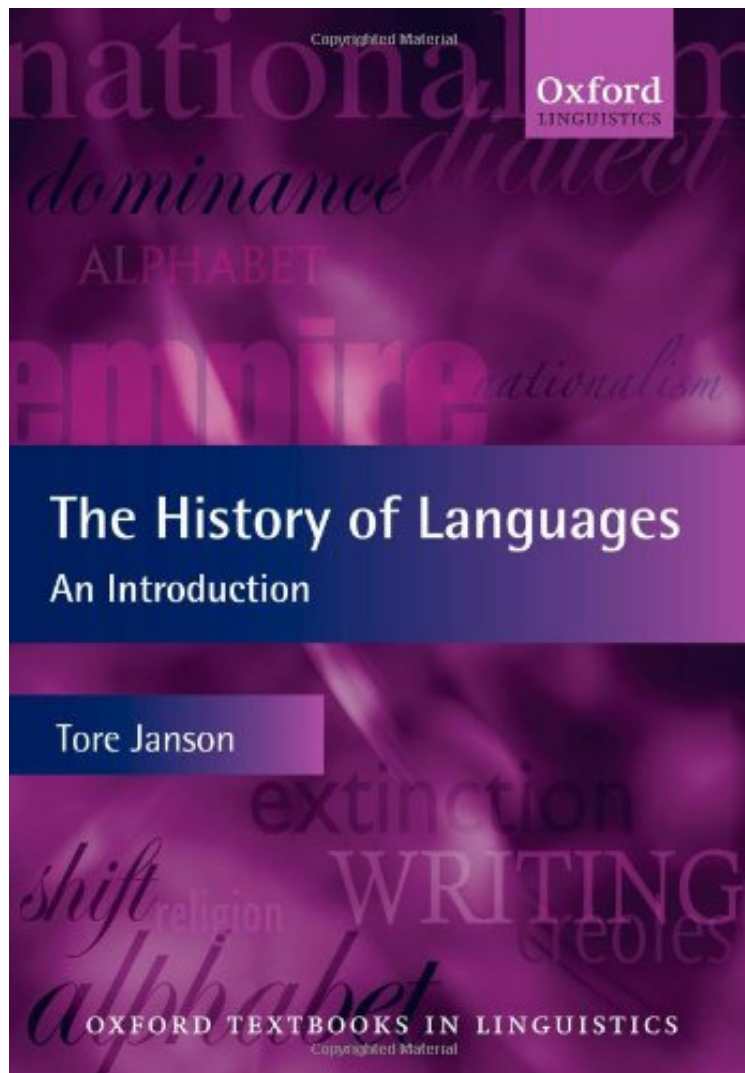


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# The History of Languages: An Introduction (Oxford Textbooks in Linguistics)

Tore Janson

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This is an introduction to the history of languages, from the distant past to a glimpse at what languages may be like in the distant future. It looks at how languages arise, change, and ultimately vanish, and what lies behind their different destinies. What happens to languages, he argues, has to do with what happens to the people who use them, and what happens to people, individually and collectively, is affected by the languages they speak. The book opens by examining what the languages are the hunter-gatherers might have spoken and the changes to language that took place when agriculture made settled communities possible. It then looks at the effects of the invention of writing, the formation of empires, the spread of religions, and the recent dominance of world powers, and shows how these relate to great changes in the use of languages. Tore Janson discusses the appearance of new languages, the reasons why some languages spread and others die, considers whether similar cyclical processes are found at different times and places, and examines the causes of internal changes in languages and dialects. The book ranges widely among the world's languages and mixes thematic chapters on general processes of change with accounts of specific languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Latin, Greek, and English.

"A highly readable introduction to the history of languages intended for students and general readers with an interest in history, anthropology, politics and linguistics. Though the central focus of the work is on the history of standard European languages, other languages such as Arabic and Chinese are considered in some detail...In sum, this textbook reinforces the idea that the study of language is linked to the study of history and society. It is appropriate for an introductory course in historical linguistics (though supplemental readings in historical phonology and morphology would need to be included in the syllabus), and it will give the student a solid overview of how societal changes effect language, as well as spark interest in a wide variety of topics such as language policy, language contact and language shift."--Linguist List

"A very useful university handbook...[The author] does not shy away from complex or controversial issues. Instead, these issues are put forward with interest, presenting to the reader the most recent scientific contributions to difficult topics with caution and moderation." Journal of Historical Linguistics

About the Author  
Tore Janson is now affiliated to the Department of Linguistics, Stockholm University. Until his retirement in 2001, he was Professor of African Languages at the University of Gothenburg. Previously, he had been Professor of Latin at the same university and is a world expert on its history. He is the author of the international bestsellers *Speak: A Short History of Languages* and *The Natural History of Latin*.