



# As Time Goes by: Tense and Universal Grammar

*Norbert Hornstein*

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## **As Time Goes by: Tense and Universal Grammar** Norbert Hornstein

How do humans acquire, at a very early age and from fragmentary and haphazard data, the complex patterns of their native language? This is the logical problem of language acquisition, and it is the question that directs the search for an innate universal grammar. "As Time Goes By extends the search by proposing a theory of natural-language tense that will be responsive to the language-acquisition problem. The core of the theory is a revision of Hans Reichenbach's theory of tense, modified to satisfy a variety of serious objections that have been brought against it. Hornstein shows how Reichenbach's basic ideas can be combined with poverty-of-stimulus considerations to yield a restricted account of possible tense in natural language. The clearly written discussion proceeds step by step from simple observations and principles to far-reaching conclusions involving complex data carefully selected and persuasively presented. The topics covered include adverbial modification, temporal adjuncts, conditionals, and sequence of tense. Throughout, Hornstein focuses on the logical problem of language acquisition, highlighting the importance of explanatory adequacy and the role of syntactic representations in determining intricate properties of semantic interpretation. Norbert Hornstein is Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Maryland.

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