

# Metaphorical and metonymic uses of 'grammar' in linguistic discourse.

Krista Teeri-Niknamoghdam<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>University of Turku, krkate@utu.fi

**Keywords:** grammar, Finnish language, linguistic discourse, metaphor, metonymy

'Grammar' is one of the key terms in the field of linguistics. However, despite its centrality – or perhaps because of it – the use of 'grammar' in linguistic discourse appears diverse (e.g., Lyons 1995). This study aims to highlight the diverse nature of 'grammar' by examining how the term is used figuratively in linguistic discourse. The study adopts the framework of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) and contrasts its findings with the previous studies conducted on the metaphorical uses of 'grammar' in pedagogical (e.g., Saaristo 2015; Cushing 2019) and other discourses (e.g., Bogetić 2017).

The data for the study consisted of 146 peer-reviewed research articles published between 2010 and 2021 in the Finnish linguistic journal *Virittäjä*, which is an academic journal dedicated to Finnish and other Finno-Ugric languages and their pedagogy. Thus, the study presents a case study into the use of 'grammar' in the Finnish linguistic discourse.

The data analysis was conducted as follows. First, all instances of the Finnish term referring to 'grammar', *kielioppi*, were retrieved from the data. Then, the instances were studied with a qualitative method by analyzing whether the term 'grammar' was used figuratively. All instances containing figurative language were then analyzed further in order to uncover the source domain for the underlying metaphor or metonymy.

The study suggests that, when using the term 'grammar', linguists rely amply on metaphorical and metonymic language: the term 'grammar' appeared in the studied research articles 234 times, and out these instances, almost half were noted to contain figurative language. The most frequent type of figurative language was a metonymy TEXT FOR AUTHOR (e.g., 'the grammar states that'). The metaphors used for 'grammar' in the data included GRAMMAR IS SPACE, GRAMMAR IS STRUCTURE, GRAMMAR IS PUTTY, GRAMMAR IS A COMPANION, GRAMMAR IS AN AUTHORITY and GRAMMAR IS A RESOURCE.

Despite the ample use of figurative language, the metaphors and metonymies present in the research articles were found to be quite uniform, that is, linguists tended to use similar metaphors and metonymies when talking about 'grammar'. This finding was anticipated, as metaphors have been observed to be linguistic practices shared by groups of people (e.g., Cameron 2008).

When contrasting the linguistic discourse with the pedagogical, the study suggests that the linguists' conceptualizations of grammar differ from language teacher's conceptualizations in one significant way: according to Cushing (2019: 163-164), language teachers tend to conceptualize grammar as a negative entity, such as 'rulebook', while this type of conceptualization is quite rare within linguists, who tend to conceptualize grammar in more neutral terms, such as 'space' or 'structure'.

## References

- Bogetić, Ksenija. 2017. Language is a 'beautiful creature', not an 'old fridge'. Direct metaphors as corrective framing devices. *Metaphor and the Social World* 7(2). 190-212.
- Cameron, Lynne. 2008. Metaphor and talk. In Raymond W. Gibbs (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, 197-211. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cushing, Ian. 2019. Resources not rulebooks. Metaphors for grammar in teachers' metalinguistic discourse. *Metaphor and the Social World* 9(2). 155-176.
- Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark. 1980. *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Lyons, John. 1995. Grammar and meaning. In F. R. Palmer (ed.), *Grammar and Meaning. Essays in Honour of Sir John Lyons*, 221-249. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Saaristo, Pekka. 2015. Grammar is the heart of language. Grammar and its role in language learning among Finnish university students. In Juha Jalkanen, Elina Jokinen & Peppi Taalas (eds.), *Voices of Pedagogical Development. Expanding, Enhancing and Exploring Higher Education Language Learning*, 279-318. Dublin: Research-publishing.net.