

Spatial metaphors in linguistic theory. How does language really fit into space?

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This presentation is based on a chapter from my recently published book, *Language learning environments: Spatial perspectives on SLA*. While the book is mostly concerned with the spatiality of second language learning, this presentation focuses on some underlying ideas on the spatiality of language itself. Taking an historical approach, I suggest that a conception of language as a self-contained ‘object-in-space’ has emerged in conjunction with the evolution of linguistics as a disciplinary space since the 17th century. This conception was articulated in 20th-century linguistics in spatial metaphors of language structure, system and network, which are evident in a range of perspectives, including the work of Saussure, Chomsky and Halliday. In contrast to these conceptions of language as ‘a space-of-its-own’, I support a more integrated view of the spatiality of language that emphasizes the ways in which language is woven into to the physical spaces of the world.