

Ojutkangas, Krista; Larjavaara, Meri; Miestamo, Matti & Ylikoski, Jussi (2009) *Johdatus kielitieteeseen*. Helsinki: WSOY Oppimateriaalit Oy. Pp. 268.

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1. Introduction

As the title suggests, *Johdatus kielitieteeseen* [Introduction to Linguistics] is an introduction to linguistics. According to the authors, the aim of the book is to familiarize the reader with the nature and study of language (p. 8). The book is written from a typological perspective, looking at world languages as well as the language situation in Finland.

Johdatus kielitieteeseen is divided into three main parts, which are further divided into a total of 10 chapters. Part One introduces the reader to the variety of languages spoken around the world, and the relationships between them. This part is subdivided into 4 chapters. As the book has an overall typological perspective, the first chapter consists of a presentation of the language situation in the world, i.e. how many, and what kind of languages there are. In chapter 2, different ways of categorizing languages are introduced. Chapter 3 introduces world languages continent by continent, and the language situation in Finland. The fourth chapter takes us into the future by looking at the prospects of, and the possible threats to, world languages.

The authors stress that the book is written from a meaning and use(r)-based point of view (p. 8). In part Two, the authors answer the question, “What is in a language?”. This part is subdivided into three chapters, chapters 5–7. Chapter 7 examines what kind of meanings can be expressed by language, and how they are expressed; and as such, forms the core of Part Two. Chapters 5 and 6 present structural elements of language as background information for chapter 7. The focus is on the possible sounds and morpho-syntactic forms of language.

Part Three of the book concentrates on what language is, focusing on the nature of language, as well as language variation and change. This part is subdivided into 3 chapters, chapters 8–10. Chapter 8 discusses the nature of language on a general level, focusing e.g. on how meanings are conveyed through language. In chapter 9, the authors present language in a

social environment and finally, in chapter 10, they discuss language change and how it comes about. Finally, the book answers the question “What is the study of language?” by briefly introducing the history and aims of linguistics, as well as current and historical methodology.

Within the different chapters, there are information boxes with more in-depth information about selected topics discussed in the text. All the parts of the book are followed by an annotated bibliography listing references used in the text, as well as references for more information. At the back of the book, the authors have added a bibliography of the books from which they have extracted the different language examples used in the text. In addition, they have enclosed a list of the world languages mentioned in the book with information about the language family they belong to, and the region where the languages are spoken, accompanied by a world map. There are also tables of sound symbols and an index of essential terms at the back of the book.

2. Background

As pointed out by the authors themselves, *Johdatus kielitieteeseen* is aimed to be comprehensive, yet compact introductory textbook to linguistics (p. 9). This book succeeds two popular Finnish language introductory textbooks in linguistics, namely Fred Karlsson’s *Yleinen kielitiede* [Linguistics] (1998) and Kaisa Häkkinen’s *Kielitieteen perusteet* [Basic Linguistics] (1995). Instead of only talking about different fields within linguistics, *Johdatus kielitieteeseen* takes one field, namely typology, as the lens through which linguistics is seen. This is justifiable, as linguistics is about language in general, and the layman’s idea of linguistics is more often than not that of typology. Thus the typological approach brings the book closer to the reader’s earlier notions of what linguistics is, or can be. In addition to this typological approach, the book succeeds in its other aim of examining language from a point of view of conveying meanings, and how this is done in communication among human beings.

3. Analysis

3.1 Which languages are there?

In chapter 1, the authors discuss the definition of language through concepts of natural versus created language, and language versus dialect.

They refer to Gordon's *The Ethnologue* (2005) in introducing assessments about the number of languages in the world, and the number of speakers for the biggest languages. Their discussion is also illustrated in a list of the most spoken languages and a graph depicting the fact that a few major languages have the most speakers. As the authors have chosen a typological approach for the book, it is appropriate to begin the book with the introduction of world languages. The text is well-written and engaging from the very beginning.

Chapter 2 discusses four different ways to categorize languages, namely genealogical, geographic, sociolinguistic, and typological. Genealogical categorization is based on origin. Languages that can linguistically be proven to originate from the same proto-language belong to the same genealogical category (p. 24). This is illustrated in the book by a helpful graph of a fictitious language family. As a concrete example the authors introduce the Indo-European language family. The genealogical categorization is based on the historical comparative method in which lexicon and grammatical elements are compared for analogies in sounds. In the book this is illustrated in a table of analogies of words in selected Indo-European languages (p. 26). The table facilitates understanding the method behind genealogical categorization, despite the small mistake for the French word for 'new'.

The second way to categorize languages is geographic. In geographic categorization languages are divided according to their geographic areas, while also considering the influence different languages and cultures have on each other (p. 33). The third method is sociolinguistic, in which languages are divided according to a language's status and function in society (p. 36). The fourth, and final, way of categorizing languages is typological, which is the predominant approach in the book. In typological categorization tens or hundreds of languages are compared for similarities and/or differences in vocabulary and form (p. 38). In all of the subchapters new linguistic terms pertaining to each type linguistic categorization are presented in a clear manner, and the reader is able to absorb a great deal of new information with great ease.

Chapter 3 discusses the languages of the world, continent by continent. This discussion also takes linguistic macro areas into consideration. The five main areas discussed are Africa, Europe, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. The language situation in Finland is discussed as a local example (p. 44). This chapter is possibly the most cumbersome in the book due to the multitude of new languages and terms presented.

However, as the result of the authors' ability to write in a well-structured and engaging manner, the reader is able to follow the text without greater difficulty. The chapter on the local language situation in Finland puts the previously presented information into perspective, and shows how different aspects can influence a language in a specific linguistic environment. The fact that all the mentioned languages are marked on a map at the back of the book makes it easier for the reader to form a general view on the languages and language families discussed. In chapter 4, the authors focus on the future of world languages, especially on the change and death of many natural languages (p. 67). Language change and variation are further discussed in chapter 10.

3.2 What is in a language?

In Part Two, the authors discuss the differences between sound and meaning, form and meaning, and vocabulary and grammar (p. 76). In connection to the differences between meaning and form, the authors also discuss different areas within linguistics and language, which are illustrated in a graph dividing language into two levels: the level of the form and the level of the use, i.e. meaning. The graph gives a clear picture of the different areas of the study of language, and thus helps the reader to structure the information in the chapter into meaningful units. Some new terms are explained in the introduction in order to make chapters 5–7 more accessible to the reader.

The division of language into meaning and form is anchored to Saussure's concepts *signifiant* (signified) and *signifié* (signified). These are illustrated with a circle that has a picture of a tree in the upper half, and the word 'tree' in the lower half. The picture supports the explanation of the difference of these concepts in the text. It also helps the reader to understand why and what kind of differences there are in languages.

Chapters 5 and 6 present background information for chapter 7. They focus on sounds and sound systems, and morpho-syntactic forms, respectively. Chapter 5 has many graphs and tables to illustrate e.g. the places and manners of articulation. The chapter begins with the sounds of all languages, but narrows the focus toward the Finnish sound system in the final part of the chapter. This helps the reader in connecting the overall view of the sound systems to their own language. Chapter 6 uses examples from a number of languages to illustrate different aspects of morpho-syntax. The examples are easy to follow, as the authors have wisely chosen

examples from Finnish as well as other languages widely known in Finland such as Swedish and English.

Chapter 7 concentrates on meaning by looking at different forms used to express similar meanings (p. 112). This chapter truly forms the core of Part Two of the book. In fact, it seems to be the heart of the entire book. In some 80 pages the authors manage to cover all the main aspects of grammar, from a morpheme to complex syntax to information structure in a text, and relate it to ways different languages use those forms to convey different meanings. The text continues to be very well structured. Tables and examples are used carefully to illustrate and clarify the text. The authors have opted to use examples from world languages not familiar to most readers, in addition to examples in Finnish. After getting accustomed to reading the examples in Finnish and other familiar languages in chapter 6, the examples are very easy to read. Each world language example is also marked with a reference, which makes further investigation possible.

3.3 What is language?

Chapter 8 discusses the nature of language. The authors stress that language is most importantly social, and that its main purpose is to convey messages between people (p. 192). The authors approach the social aspects of language through the concepts of meaning and token. They use the concept of prototype in explaining meanings of words, as well as markedness in explaining grammatical categories. Language describes the world not as it is, but how human beings see it. This can be done using tokens. The authors further develop Saussure's idea of signifié and signifiant in a graph (p. 195). A token consists of a form (signifiant) in a language, and a concept (signifié) in the mind. This token then refers to an entity, action, or characteristic in the world. The authors further divide tokens into three different types: indexes, icons, and symbols. They argue that the use of symbols and intentionality in particular separate human language from animal languages.

The authors also talk about the relationship between language and thought. Language does have an effect on thought, but non-linguistic thought also exists. In this chapter, the authors build an argument for their view of language as a social entity. They also manage to introduce an array of important linguistic terms and necessary background information for later discussion of language in use in the following chapters.

In chapter 9, the authors focus on the social aspect of language. As an example of the social aspect of language, they look at variation and multilingualism (p. 204). They examine both geographic and social variation, as well as variation within a context. The authors bind these different elements in language variation together with Saussure's *langue* and *parole*. Here *langue* is the language system, and *parole* the different ways people use language, i.e. the different variations of a language (p. 207). The authors also look at multilingualism by defining a native and a multilingual speaker, and diglossia. In this chapter, the authors succeed in introducing a number of new terms in a straightforward manner, while going through a short historical background of sociolinguistics.

Chapter 10 continues to examine the social aspects of language by looking at language variation and change, and the principles behind these phenomena (p. 213). The topic is introduced via synchronic and diachronic study of language as examples of different approaches to the study of language. The authors illustrate these two methods very well via fictitious and genuine examples in the text, using tables to support these examples. The authors also look at some principles that may cause language change using a felicitous metaphor of price quality ratio. The price is the difficulty in producing or understanding speech, and the quality is the effectiveness of producing speech (p. 218). The authors also list possible rules and principles for language change. Throughout the chapter, the authors manage to convey that language is always subjected to change, and that this change can be studied for example by using a synchronic or a diachronic method.

3.4 What is the study of language?

In the last pages of the book, the authors acquaint the reader with an abridged history of linguistics, as well as the current trends in linguistics. At the end of this part, the authors have attached a helpful list of linguistic corpora. This section gives the reader a good overall view of linguistics, and the references at the back of the text guide the reader to explore topics of interest even further. However, this part seems somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book. Nevertheless, it merits its place in the book as it provides the reader with a greater context for the rest of the information the book has presented.

4. Conclusions

Johdatus kielitieteeseen aims to be a comprehensive, yet concise introductory textbook of linguistics, and succeeds in its aims. It is a well-written and well-structured book, and the text is illustrated and aided with many helpful graphs, tables, and examples from different languages. Although some graphs (e.g. graphs on pp. 21, 143), however, seem unnecessary, they do serve to make the overall layout more accessible. The annotated references at the back of each part facilitate further investigation of topics of interest. Also, the information boxes, which cover topics related to those in the text, give the reader a possibility to deepen their understanding of selected linguistic phenomena. *Johdatus kielitieteeseen* sets out to discuss language and linguistics from the point of view of meaning and use. This is a new and refreshing way to introduce linguistics, and the authors succeed in making the book very user-friendly in the process. The book can be recommended for new students of linguistics and languages as a starting point in their linguistic studies, as well as for more advanced students as a manual of linguistics.

References

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