The Mystery of Language

for Dr Theo A.J.M. Janssen,
grandad of Joris, Derek, Tim en Noor,
on the occasion of his retirement as professor of Dutch Linguistics
at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Once upon a time....
... there was a scholar who wished to discover the big mystery of language.

He spent hours, days, weeks, months, years, even decennia thinking about that mystery.
And finally, on the eighth day of the ninth month of the sixth year, he knew it.

And he told other scholars, young and old.
First there was silence.
Then came sound.
“Are you sleepy again?”

Then came speaker-hearer interaction.

“Gaaaa!”
Grandad!

Then the word.
Grandad is my big friend

Then came the sentence.
“This is the ‘I-am-your-big-friend-and-you’re-mine’ hug”

And finally the sentence attached to a word.
“But... how is the wonder of language possible?” asked a young scholar.

“This will always remain a mystery,” answered the scholar. But one of the invisible forces behind all this is an old lady: madam Metonymy.
The scholar had a look at his story and thought it was good enough.

Now that he understood it all, Theo rested.