We use metaphor and metonymy on a regular basis in everyday language, but what metaphors and metonymies materialize as part of students' conceptions of sampling distribution and informal inference in an introductory statistics course? Student difficulties in understanding ideas of sampling distributions and informal inference are well documented in the literature. Although we know that these ideas are complex and difficult for students, little is known about the ways in which students' language mediates their statistical problem solving activities. In this talk, I will give a brief review of the statistics education literature on student understanding and misconceptions about sampling distributions. Then I will describe part of my current research, which explores students' use of metonymy when speaking about distributions, sampling ideas, and statistical inference. I will also take this opportunity to give the audience (in particular, graduate students in Statistics) an overview of the statistics education research literature, as well as some recommendations for teaching an introductory statistics course based on recent studies in statistics education.

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