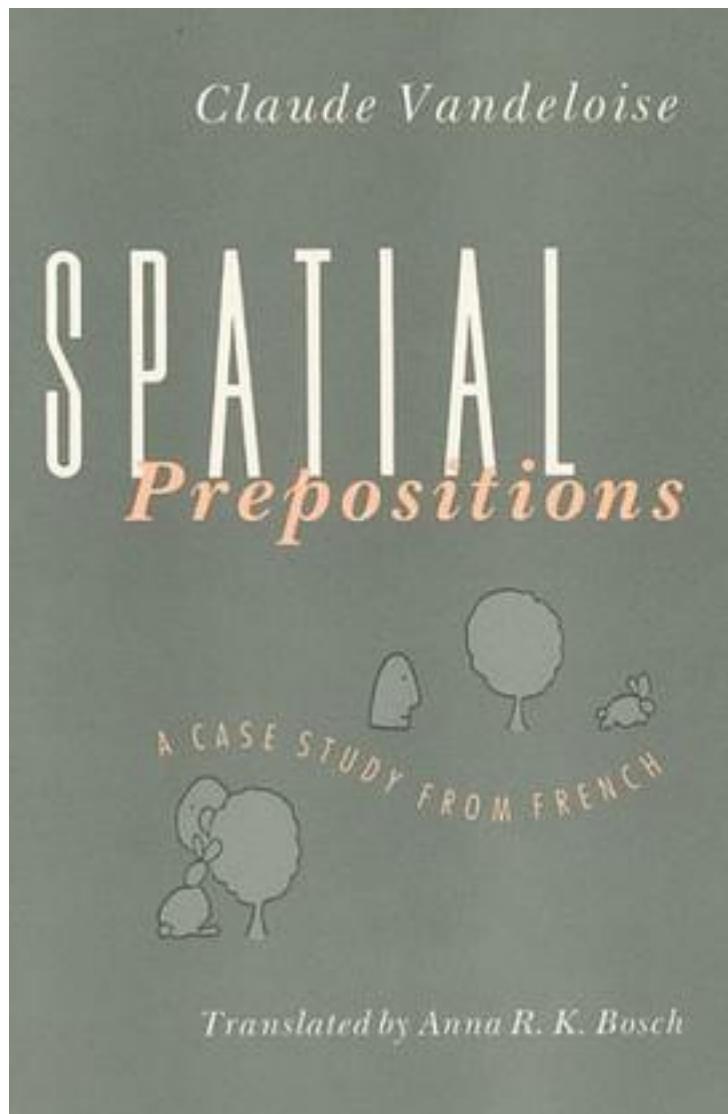


Spatial Prepositions



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This striking study of the meaning and use of the major spatial prepositions in French provides valuable insight into how the human mind organizes spatial relationships.

Most previous analyses of spatial prepositions have assumed that their semantic properties can be adequately explained by familiar logical and geometrical concepts. Thus, the standard view of the preposition "in" as it appears in the sentence "the ball is in the bag" postulates that it refers to the geometrical relation of inclusion. This paradigm, however, falters when faced with the contrast in acceptability between sentences such as "the bulb is in the socket" and "the bottle is in the cap." The force exerted by the "landmark" (a conceptually fixed object) on the "target" (a moveable object) is crucial in this difference: the functional notion of containment seems more operational in the use of the preposition "in" than inclusion. That is, what are taken to be the landmark and the target depend greatly on the "functions" these objects serve in the human scheme. This offers important clues to otherwise problematic linguistic quirks, such as why one sleeps "in" one's bed, while one is said to lie "on" one's deathbed.

While many of the examples apply in English as well as French, there are some noteworthy differences--in French one sits "on" a chair, but "in" a couch. Vandeloise convincingly argues that it is precisely this subjective element which makes a standard geometrical account unfeasible.

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