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**Lindstromberg, Seth (compiled by) (2010) *English Prepositions Explained*. Revised edition. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 273 pp.**

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**P**repositions refer to a grammatical class of words whose meanings indicate relations between things. In general, prepositions are closed-class linguistic items, i.e. they constitute a group of relatively few members which typically undergo changes rather slowly. In some languages, like English, prepositions play a central role in linguistic expression.

*English Prepositions Explained (EPE)* is a reference book about prepositions for “anyone who is inquisitive about the English language” (1); more precisely, it is intended to help teachers and students, translators and interpreters in training, advanced users as well as writers of pedagogical materials. It covers almost 100 different simple, compound, and phrasal prepositions currently in use in the standard and contemporary British and North American English, and focuses particularly on short, high frequency prepositions such as *to*, *on* and *in*. The book takes a usage-based approach to modern prepositions and thus leaves out many low frequency, often archaic words (list available: 3). Given this approach, *EPE* employs examples from up-to-date corpuses and describes ‘basic’ meanings of prepositions as they appear in use.

*EPE* contains the following parts: the introductory chapter includes author’s remarks on the contents and some general notes on the meanings, classification and presentation of prepositions in the book. The actual content part is divided into chapters, each of which explains prepositions around a common meaning. In the final part, the book provides a survey of several abstract notions that prepositions may have, and offers a list of research literature as well as a glossary and index of central linguistic terms and entries.

*EPE* explains prepositions from a semantic viewpoint. Instead of studying their grammatical patterning, prepositional meanings are described verbally and illustrated pictorially. Meaning comprises here both the literal, spatial, and the abstract, figurative dimensions. The theoretical framework, although not explicitly presented, comes from Cognitive Linguistics.

To illustrate (and test) the use of the book, let us now look at one preposition and see how it is explained. I choose the preposition *in* because of its common and presumably ambiguous use. Indeed, *in* appears as a simple and compound preposition in several chapters. I decide to limit my inquiry in the simple form, which is present in four

chapters. I now turn to view the first of these (Chapter 2). Generally, this chapter “provides a first look at the meanings of several prepositions of direction and course of path” (29). In the chapter, *in* is presented together with *into* (31 ff). This entry discusses first some differences between the meanings of *in/into* and *to* and then goes on to explaining the spatial meanings of *in*, compared to *into*. Finally, the entry surveys some metaphorical usages of *in*, again in comparison with *into*. The second entry of *in* (Ch. 4) occurs together with the prepositions *on* and *out* and defines their usages “as non-dynamic *prepositions of place*.” Here again, *in* is defined through comparison with other distinct or neighbouring prepositions and its literal as well as figurative meanings are discussed.

Thus, the book appears to group the prepositions into chapters according to a broad semantic frame that connects the prepositions in question: direction and path in Chapter 2, and non-dynamic prepositions of place in Chapter 4. However, this connection is not always explicitly described. So, for example, chapters 5 and 11 can be understood—after some contemplation—to consider certain prepositions of place and path that share the idea of a horizontal plane and the notion of spatial proximity, respectively. Certainly, the difficulty to form clear-cut groups follows from the fact that many prepositions exhibit great polysemy and have fuzzy boundaries, i.e. there are several meanings and uses, of which some are more definite, others more peripheral (cf. Evans and Green 2006).

On the whole, *EPE* covers English prepositions at an extensive length, and succeeds in organising and illustrating a large and fuzzy amount of information, and in offering a pedagogical insight to its contents. For instance, the proposals for classification of prepositions (15–19) are meant to provide pedagogical ideas. The index in the end of the book offers another valuable aid, with which readers can conduct searches for prepositions and find them readily in the text.

Nevertheless, some minor drawbacks can be noted. The book declares to discuss prepositions “in current use throughout the English-speaking world” (2), but on a later occasion it takes this to mean British and North American English and not to include the many other varieties (4–5). Also, though *EPE* has wanted to leave out much of the theoretical framework, some background could have been added to the introductory part; for instance, central notions for explaining the semantics such as ‘Subject’ and ‘Landmark’ could be more developed (see 6); perhaps the explanation would become clearer to the reader, who might not be familiar with Cognitive Linguistics, if it were not embedded in an example.

For the ‘inquisitives about language,’ there is certainly a call for the kind of books *EPE* represents, books that shed light on one essential but wide category of language in an explanatory and comprehensible manner. Similar accounts for other languages are thus mostly welcome.

**References**

Evans, Vyvyan and Green, Melanie (2006). *Cognitive Linguistics. An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

**Maija Hirvonen**

**maija.hirvonen@gmail.com**

**University of Helsinki (Finland); TransMedia Catalonia (Spain).**