

# Space in the causal chain: the perspective from French and Biblical Hebrew

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Prepositions marking causers in passive sentences often share a spatial meaning, either synchronically or diachronically (e.g. English *by*). Some languages have more than one such preposition, like French (*de* ‘from’ vs. *par* ‘through’) and Biblical Hebrew (*min* ‘from’ vs. *bə* ‘in’). Building on Croft’s (2012) ideas on the causal chain, we show that the differences between causal prepositions in these languages can be explained with reference to their original, spatial meaning. However, French and Biblical Hebrew differ in the way spatial notions are recycled to express notions related to causality (e.g. control, volitionality, instigation). In French, the greater distance from the Agent to the Patient expressed by the Source preposition *de* ‘from’ is interpreted as a lack of influence of the Agent on the Patient. On the other hand, the Biblical Hebrew Source preposition *min* ‘from’ expresses a greater degree of control of the Agent over the Patient, because it stands at the beginning of the causal chain. These two alternatives can be described in terms of different perspectives on the spatio-causal chain. French adopts a Patient-oriented perspective: the distance of an argument to the Patient is reinterpreted in terms of distant, non-influential causality. Biblical Hebrew has a Source-oriented perspective where the position relative to the start of the spatio-causal chain is of primary importance.

## References

Croft, William. 2012. *Verbs: Aspect and Causal Structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.