

# A cognitive perspective on the semantics of *near*

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The present study investigates the semantic structure of the word *near* assuming that its distinct senses form a semantic network with a prototypical spatial sense at the center and various extended senses at different distances away from the prototype. In order to explain the extensions of *near*, the cognitive notions of construal, image schema transformation, metaphor and metonymy are taken into consideration. The conceptual blending theory is used to explain the semantic structure of the complex preposition *near to*. The research reveals that the word *near* functions as a preposition (also a part of the complex preposition *near to*), an adverb, an adjective and a verb, and that its semantic structure is best viewed as a continuum encoding both lexical and grammatical information. At the same time, the analysis shows that the polysemy of *near* is rather impoverished when compared to the polysemies of other spatial prepositions, such as *in*, *on*, *at* or *over*.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, semantics, spatial prepositions

## 1. Introduction

According to major dictionaries of the English language (the *Oxford English dictionary*, (Murray, Bradley, Craigie, & Onions, 1989; henceforth OED, 1989), the *Oxford dictionary*,<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster dictionary*<sup>2</sup> and *Free dictionary*)<sup>3</sup> the word *near* can be a preposition, an adverb, an adjective and a verb. The results of the research conducted for the purpose of the present study confirm such categorization

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1. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/near?q=near/>
  2. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/near>
  3. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/near>

revealing at the same time different frequencies of occurrence of the word *near* for different categories.

In the OED (1989) the word *near* is labeled first and foremost as an adverb and preposition, and only later as an adjective and verb. However, it is its prepositional and adverbial categorical distinction that has generated a lot of discussion. Historically, there has been a natural affinity between adverbs and prepositions. The beginning of the close relation between the two word classes goes back to Proto-Indo-European which is attested to lack prepositions and to express relations of different kinds by means of numerous cases and adverbs (Saussure, 1959, p. 180). The prepositional class emerged as a consequence of changing the sentential order of certain adverbs, which were thus linked more closely with the noun and which started to fulfill a new function. Probably most Old English simple prepositions developed out of adverbs in the similar fashion and retained an intimate connection with them (Lundskær-Nielsen, 1993, p. 18).

On the level of grammar there have been attempts not to demarcate adverbs from prepositions but rather to treat the two word classes in a unified fashion. It has been argued that prepositions and adverbs should be included in one class and the presence or absence of complementation should not influence the classification (Jespersen, 1951, pp. 87–90). Argumentation to support the claim that the boundaries of adverbial and prepositional categories are more fuzzy than traditional grammarians claim (e.g. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech G., & Svartvik, 1985) is also presented in Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 2005); however their account is not entirely convincing (for a detailed discussion see Brenda, 2014, pp. 87–90).

Even though the grammatical classification of prepositions and adverbs is a problematic matter, on the conceptual level they both designate atemporal or nonprocessual relations and are distinguished on the basis of individual trajector/landmark organizations they encode (Langacker, 2008, pp. 115–117). Adverbs are different from prepositions as they involve only one focal participant, that is the trajector (henceforth TR) constituted by a relationship, while prepositions involve both the TR, constituted by a thing or a relationship, and the landmark henceforth LM) constituted by a thing. For example, the word *near* in *an attractive girl in jeans hovered near* locates the girl's hovering at the positive end of a distance measuring scale thereby granting the activity focal prominence or the TR status. On the other hand, *near* in *CERN, Europe's center near Geneva* gives Europe's center the primary focal prominence, that is, the TR status, and Geneva the secondary focal prominence, the LM status.

The earliest records of the word *near* dating back to the 9th century (OED, 1989) may suggest that the word is well established in the English language. Originally, *near* was the comparative of the Old English adverb *néah* and the transition to the positive sense in Old Norse probably started in expressions such as *koma* or *ganga*

*nær* meaning ‘to come/go nearer’ (to a person or place), which passed into the sense ‘close’ or ‘near.’ After the positive sense attached to *nær*, the word was also used with stative verbs, such as *standa* or *vera* (‘to be’) either without a complement or with a noun in the dative case. The word *near* continued to be used also in Middle English when the complex preposition *near to* and the adjective *near* were introduced. The word gained its verbal extension relatively late, as the earliest record dates from 1513.

## 2. Methodology

For the purpose of the present study a total of 2172 sentences containing the word *near* were randomly selected from the British National Corpus<sup>4</sup> and analyzed to determine the semantic structure of the word and its frequencies of use. First, the data were divided in terms of the occurrence of the simple structure *near*, with 2074 instances, and the complex one *near to*, with 98. Then, the word *near* was assigned to prepositional, adverbial, adjectival and verbal categories, and to a group of idiomatic expressions (which contains only two expressions *far and near* and *near and dear*). Table 1 shows the frequencies for occurrence of the word *near* in the categories.

**Table 1.** The frequency of occurrence for *near*

Word class	Number of occurrences per 2172
the preposition <i>near</i>	1750
the preposition <i>near to</i>	98
the adverb <i>near</i>	166
the adjective <i>near</i>	131
the verb <i>near</i>	3
idiomatic expressions with <i>near</i>	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>2172</b>

The present study of the word *near* demonstrates that the preposition, adverb, adjective and verb *near* as well as the preposition *near to* are semantically close. The preposition *near* and the complex preposition *near to* have five different senses in their semantic networks, that is, the In-the-vicinity, Interaction, Approach, Approximately and Temporal senses, whereas the adverb and adjective *near* have the same four senses with the exclusion of the Approximately Sense.

4. <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>

### 3. Mechanisms behind sense extensions of the word *near*

The function of spatial prepositions is to indicate the domain in which to search for the localized object encoded by an expression. Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976, p. 384) distinguish two search domains of any spatial linguistic unit of the form *x preposition y* (where *x* corresponds to a TR and *y* to a LM). The first domain is the one in which to search for the LM, whereas the second subdomain depends on the relation expressed by the preposition and the characteristics of the LM. For example, when interpreting the phrase *CERN, Europe's center near Geneva*, we first need to locate the LM, Geneva, and then search for the center in the vicinity of Geneva as indicated by the preposition *near*. Thus, a natural consequence of establishing a search domain with respect to the preposition *near*, is the notion of a region surrounding the LM.

Various studies into spatial prepositions have attempted to describe their primary senses as encoding the simplest spatial relation between two objects (for example Cuyckens, 1993, p. 35; Dirven, 1993, pp. 74–76; Herskovits, 1986, pp. 39–56; Ho-Abdullah, 2010, p. 84; Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976, pp. 382–394; Tyler & Evans, 2003, pp. 45–47). By the same token, the present study assumes as primary the simple geometric configuration of proximity between the spatial TR and LM. The speaker establishes a particular construal relation between himself and the viewed scene in order to observe and communicate this relationship. He may describe the scene more or less schematically focusing on selected aspects of the scene and attaching more or less prominence to them.

Construing a spatial scene involves the following aspects: specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective (Langacker, 1987, pp. 107–137; 2008, pp. 66–96). Construing a spatial scene encoded by the primary sense of the preposition *near*, for example, activates various domains in the human cognitive system, such as SPACE, OBJECT, SPATIAL RELATION and PROXIMITY. Within this onstage region the language user gives a particular sort of prominence to a selected knowledge structure bringing about the conceptualization of one entity being proximal to another. The PROXIMITY schema evoked is relatively coarse-grained and may be expressed in language by different spatial expressions, such as *by*, *near to*, *next to*, *close to*, *beside* or *around*. An even more fine-grained schema is the particular NEAR schema activated by the preposition *near* denoting one object found in the vicinity of another object. Within the scene, when the two objects in a proximal relation are selected, one is given more prominence and starts functioning as the TR, while the other is a relatively backgrounded LM. The selected conceptual content is the profile of a linguistic expression participating in a profile/base relation (Langacker, 1987, pp. 183–189) equivalent to the notion of concept (for a comparison of the theoretical constructs see Clausner & Croft, 1999, p. 4).

Not all of the conceptual content selected by a linguistic expression always participates in the relation encoded by the expression. Active zone refers to a part of a given entity which participates in that relation. In *Your dog bit my cat* only a part of the dog, notably the teeth and jaws, and the part of the cat that was actually bitten participated in the action (Langacker, 2000, p. 62).

This kind of profile/active zone discrepancy constitutes a special type of metonymy which may be helpful to explain the differences between the prepositions *near* and *at*. The difference between the two phrases *CERN, Europe's center near Geneva* and *CERN, Europe's center at Geneva* rests on the presence and absence of the profile/base discrepancy respectively. In other words, the preposition *near* selects an active zone of its LM, Geneva, which is the side of the city closer to the center. On the other hand, the preposition *at* presupposes a bigger distance between the observer and the viewed spatial scene and, therefore, reduces Geneva to a punctual entity (Herskovits, 1986, pp. 128–139). This purely spatial sense of *at* may also be further extended in expressions such as *at school* and *at the airport* where the presence of the TR at a location corresponds with a certain function the TR performs there.

Perspective is yet another aspect of construal defined as a viewing arrangement pertaining to the relationship between the viewer and the scene being viewed. A default vantage point involves the speaker located “off stage” viewing a scene from a certain distance. Although the preposition *near* encodes only the off stage vantage point, different vantage points are responsible for sense extensions in the semantic network of the preposition *over*. In *Weak sun was rising off to the east over the distant buildings* (BNC FP3 1450) the viewer is located off stage in order to register the higher-than relation between the sun and the distant buildings, but the vantage point changes in *But for now she lives over the border in the Dominican Republic* (BNC FSR 136) where the viewer should be located on “this” side of the border in order to notice that the woman lives on its “other” side.

Peripheral extensions of the semantic network of spatial prepositions are motivated by means of changes in the construal of the encoded scene or, in other words, in image schema transformations, and by means of metaphorical transfer. Image schemas, such as OBJECT, NEAR-FAR, PATH, GOAL, evoked by *near*, are rudimentary concepts which encode human embodied experience of the world (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Image schemas can also undergo transformations as a result of the human ability to focus on different aspects of experience. For example, the PATH schema underlying the A-B-C Trajectory Sense of the preposition *over* in *The dog jumped over the fence into Jubilee Wood* (BNC ABX 1173) is transformed into the END-OF-PATH schema in *But for now she lives over the border in the Dominican Republic* (BNC FSR 136).

Non-spatial sense extensions result from metaphorical transfer from the spatial to non-spatial domains. Conceptual metaphors in language are understood in terms of cross domain mappings from a sensorimotor source domain to a target domain of subjective experience (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). The NEAR-FAR schema encoded by the primary sense of the preposition *near*, for example, is transferred to the domain of emotions. Specifically, the human experience of being near an object is correlated with the experience of being intimate and friendly with this object in line with the INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL CLOSENESS metaphor.

#### 4. The senses of the prepositions *near* and *near to*

The semantic analysis of the locative prepositions *near* and *near to* reveals five regions of “higher semantic density” (Cruse, 2000, p. 30) in the semantic structure of the prepositions: in the vicinity, interaction, approaching, approximately and temporal. A distinct sense is proposed when the prepositions encode a new geometric configuration between the TR and LM, or when a new metaphorical meaning component is found (Tyler & Evans, 2003, pp. 42–45). The senses may be visualized as a semantic network in Figure 1 with the primary sense functioning as the prototype of the category (the bold circle) and other senses being its more or less prototypical extensions (the lightly shaded circles). The arrows indicate the direction of change from one sense to the next.

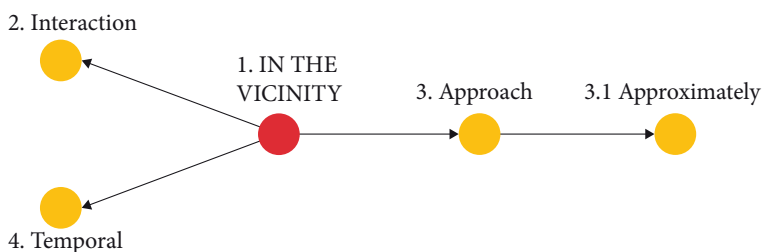


Figure 1. The semantic network for the prepositions *near* and *near to*

The frequencies of occurrence in the collected database for the prepositions *near* and *near to* are presented in Tables 2 and 3 respectively. The preposition *near* constitutes the majority in the collected sample amounting to 80 per cent of all instances, while *near to* accounts for only about 5 per cent.

**Table 2.** The frequency of occurrence for the preposition *near*

Sense	Number of occurrences per 1750
The In-the-vicinity Sense	1591
The Interaction Sense	53
The Approach Sense	32
The Approximately Sense	20
The Temporal Sense	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>1750</b>

**Table 3.** The frequency of occurrence for the preposition *near to*

Sense	Number of occurrences per 98
The In-the-vicinity Sense	64
The Interaction Sense	3
The Approach Sense	25
The Approximately Sense	3
The Temporal Sense	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>

In the sample of 2172 sentences 1750 contained the preposition *near* and 98 the preposition *near to*. The spatial In-the-vicinity Sense encoding the simplest TR-LM configuration is the most frequently instantiated subcategory of both prepositions amounting to 1591 occurrences for the preposition *near* and 59 for *near to*. The Interaction Sense is instantiated by 53 and 3 occurrences respectively, the Approach Sense by 32 and 25, The Approximately Sense by 20 and 3, and the Temporal Sense by 54 and 3.

#### 4.1 The senses of the preposition *near*

##### 4.1.1 *The primary sense of the preposition near – In-the-vicinity Sense*

Even the very earliest Old English texts from around 700 contain a number of linguistic items which belong to the prepositional word class (Lundskær-Nielsen, 1993, p. 17). The first meaning of both the adverb and preposition *near*, recorded in *Beowulf* in line 745, *Forð near ætstop ...* (Forward near he approached ...), paraphrased as ‘nearer or closer (to a place, point, or person)’ is already obsolete if not used dialectally (OED, 1989). The origin of the sense which has survived into contemporary English and denotes ‘to, within, or at, a short distance; to or in, close

proximity' can be traced back to around 1250 when it was first recorded in *Egipte wimmen comen ner*.<sup>5</sup>

In line with one of the main cognitive assumptions, human embodied experience has direct consequences for human cognition (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). This is particularly true of ubiquitous spatial relations and it finds its expression in our understanding and usage of spatial terms in language. The primary sense of the preposition *near* evokes the OBJECT and NEAR-FAR image schemas which emerge together with the CENTER-PERIPHERY and SCALE schemas in such a way that when the object described as near is established, we at the same time activate the SCALE and CENTER-PERIPHERY schemas to determine its distance from the center (Johnson, 1987, p. 125).

The preposition *near* is a topological preposition which disregards the metric distance between the TR and LM (Coventry & Garrod, 2004, pp. 7–8) and which specifies proximity between two objects (Radden & Dirven, 2007, p. 311; Malt & Wolff, 2010, p. 304). Being a topological preposition, *near* encodes a spatial relation regardless of the actual distance between two objects measured by Euclidean metric. Topological prepositions do not depend on the viewpoint of the observer in contrast to projective prepositions, which denote regions projected from the axis of the LM, and may construe their senses by means of different locations of the observer.

The preposition *near* typically construes spatial scenes irrespective of the vantage point and the orientation of the involved entities. That is to say, all the senses of *near* encode the viewer located in a default off-stage position, thereby maximizing subjectivity with which the scene is construed (Langacker, 1987, pp. 128–132; 2008, p. 77). The preposition *near* also encodes a symmetrical relation between the TR and LM of similar sizes, in the sense that when the TR is near the LM, the LM is also near the TR (Herskovits, 1986, p. 35); otherwise, as a large body of psychological research shows, bigger LM are better reference objects than smaller ones (Coventry & Garrod, 2004, pp. 113–117).

The research conducted for the purpose of the present study demonstrates that the preposition *near* locates the TR in a region surrounding the LM. Spatial phrases containing this proximity term establish search domains or regions in the vicinity of their LMs (Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976, pp. 380–404; Svorou, 1994, pp. 12–18). For example, in the database collected, the primary sense of the preposition *near*, the In-the-vicinity Sense, frequently used with proper names of human dwellings of different sizes and with names of geographical regions, such as mountain ranges, islands, lakes and forests, delimits an area surrounding those LMs in which to look for their TRs:

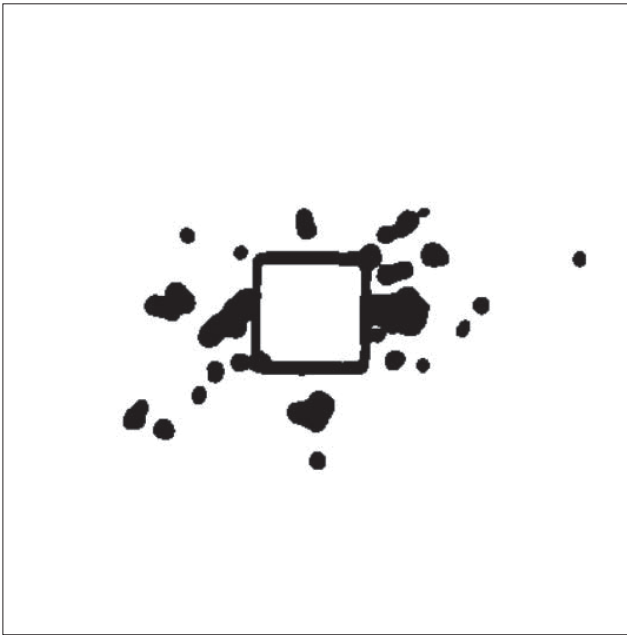
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5. Gen & Ex. 2611.



- (1) (...) CERN, Europe's center near Geneva (...)  
 (2) Manzoni was born in 1785 near Lake Como (...)

The preposition *near* localizes CERN, the centre for research into subatomic particles, in (1) in the region surrounding Geneva and the place of Manzoni's birth in (2) in the region surrounding Lake Como. Put differently, the regions surrounding Geneva and Lake Como represent search domains in which to look for the TRs, CERN and Manzoni's birth place respectively. The experimentally tested region of acceptability for the preposition *near* (Logan & Sadler, 1996) in Figure 2 shows the preposition's possible search domain averaged across 68 subjects. The square in Figure 2 represents the LM and the dots show the possible positions of the TR which may be considered *near* the LM.



**Figure 2.** Distances between the TR and LM encoded by the preposition *near* (Logan & Sadler, 1996, p. 508)

It appears that, at least for some of the subjects, the preposition *near* can encode contact between the TR and LM. This contradicts observations made with respect to *near* about the absence of contact between the TR and LM (Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976, p. 392; Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 152). It is further specified that the difference between *near* and *by* rests on the lack and presence of contact or connection between the TR and LM respectively (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 144). However,

the present research reveals that, especially with small objects in a small scale, the contact between the TR and LM cannot be precluded. The interpretation of sentence (3) below, for instance, suggests that the TR *he* can be searched for in the vicinity of the LM, the side of the boat. It is quite possible that the man is either leaning against the side of the boat or sitting a short distance away from the boat.<sup>6</sup>

(3) *Sometimes, when he had been sitting near the side of the boat (...)*

The basic spatial relationship encoded by the preposition *near* and abstracted away from various linguistic instances of use is represented in Figure 3:

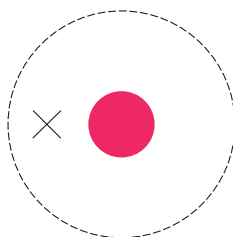


Figure 3. The primary sense of the preposition *near*

In Figure 3 the x-symbol symbolizes the TR and the black circle the LM in a spatial scene. The preposition *near* selects its search domain constituting a certain region surrounding the LM in which to look for the TR. The TR is located within this region and in some cases may also be in contact with the LM.

The preposition *near* is neutral with respect to the dimensionality of the LM at the same time demonstrating profile/active zone discrepancy (Langacker, 2000, pp. 62–67). LMs selected by *near* may be one-, two- or three-dimensional, with zero-dimensional LMs being reserved for the preposition *at*. However, not always the whole LM participates in the relation with the TR. Thus, in (1) only the part of Geneva near CERN is an active zone of the LM in a relationship with the TR. As noted above, this may be the coding difference between *near* and *at* which does not exhibit profile/active zone discrepancy and which selects the whole LM as its active participant. The following sentences encode various dimensions of LMs:

(4) *Azzafi could be beaten for speed near the finish.*

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6. Logan and Sadler's (1996) experiment asks the subjects to mark a purely spatial relation which can be described as *near* with reference to a 8.5 mm square in a 5.9 cm frame. However, nongeometric factors, such as background knowledge of the world and functional relationships between the TR and LM, may influence the choice of a given spatial term (Coventry & Garrod, 2004, pp. 116–117).

- (5) *It has been suggested that the magnetic field (...) arises from magnetized rocks near the surface (...)*
- (6) *There was nothing to alarm him, no activity in the building at the end or near the hangars.*

Sentence (4) above encodes a one-dimensional horizontal LM, *the finish line*, sentence (5) a two-dimensional horizontal LM, *the surface*, and sentence (6) a three-dimensional LM, *the hangars*. Profile/active zone discrepancy is absent from the conceptualization prompting for one-dimensional LM in (4). Here, the TR, Azzafi, is searched for near the whole selected LM, the finish line. Sentence (5) prompts for the conceptualization of the surface of the Earth, which constitutes a bounded LM of a large size. The TR, magnetized rocks, are described as being located in the vicinity of the LM, the surface, however only the selected area of the surface near the rocks is taken into consideration due to the limitations of the human visual field. In similar fashion, the TR in (6), the building, located near the LM, the hangars, selects only the side of the hangars that is closer to the TR.

There are a few spatial expressions encoding the concept of proximity, for example, *close to*, *by*, *next to*, *beside* and *nearby*, that could be used to paraphrase the primary sense of the preposition *near* with slight modifications in meaning. The preposition *close to* derives from the adverb meaning ‘in (or into) a position in which the intervening space is closed up, so that there is no interval; in immediate contact or proximity; as near as can be, very near’, and the adjective used ‘of closed or shut up state or condition [...], with the secondary associations of concealment, exclusiveness, narrowness’ (OED, 1989). Thus, the preposition *close to* evokes the concept of proximity and contact between the two objects, whereas the preposition *near* is neutral with respect to contact between the TR and LM. The preposition *by* in its primary sense encodes the TR’s proximal position only in the horizontal plane, unlike *near* which also encodes the vertical plane, and the geometrical relation is supplemented by a functional element of connection between the TR and LM, however vague it would be (Dirven, 1993, p. 75; Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 144). This connection between the TR and LM of *by* may indicate that the two objects are either in contact with one another or interact with one another. The prepositions *next to* and *beside* also encode the spatial relation in the horizontal plane. *Next to* prompts for the conceptualization of a sequential arrangement of the TR and LM with no intervening object in between. *Beside* may be paraphrased as ‘by the side of; hence, close to’ (OED, 1989) and typically precludes contact between the TR and LM (Lindstromberg, 2010, p. 153). *Nearby* is an adverb meaning ‘close by, close at hand’ and it is used as a preposition only dialectally (OED, 1989).

The preposition *near* selects a certain amount of spatial information for coding. Langacker (2008, p. 63) claims that this scope of a linguistic expression is always

bounded although adjustable for distance which allows us to use the same linguistic expression about situations observable at any scale. However, experiments show that geometric properties, such as the size of the TR and LM and the scale at which the objects are viewed, influence the choice of a spatial expression (Burgio & Coventry, 2010). Small objects placed one meter apart would be probably described as being *far* from one another, whereas large objects, such as a ship and a sailboat, would be considered dangerously near one another. By the same token, the distance between the fork and the knife would be described as *far* when they are placed on a table and as *near* when they are on a football pitch.

#### 4.1.2 *The Interaction Sense of the preposition near*

As human beings learn what it means to be near an object or a person with their bodies, the NEAR-FAR image schema must emerge first as a physical pattern abstracting away from concrete behaviors. However, not all image schemas are directly tied to sensory experience. For example, the CYCLE and SCALE schemas refer to the general pattern of recurring states and not only to circular motion (Grady, 2005, p. 38). Image schemas may be metaphorically extended to help us structure what we understand about the world. In certain contexts, for example, a geometric relation of proximity between two people may result in feelings of friendship and intimacy. On the other hand, a short physical distance between two entities may be a threatening experience. In this way the physical NEAR-FAR image schema is metaphorically extended to mean INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL CLOSENESS, or conversely, DANGER IS PHYSICAL CLOSENESS.

The Interaction Sense of the preposition *near* arises via the process of pragmatic strengthening during which there is a shift in meaning from a physical situation to a cognitive or perceptual situation (Traugott, 1988, pp. 407–409). The Interaction Sense arises when the preposition *near* is used with verbs denoting motion, such as *come*, *go* and *get*, as well as with verbs denoting permission, such as *let* and *allow*. Usually, instances of the Interaction Sense involve animate objects as TRs and LMs, mostly people.

The earliest use of the Interaction Sense dates back to 831: *Nis Eðelmode enig meghond neor ðes cynees ðanne Eadwald*, which means ‘noone was nearer Eðelmode than Eadwald’ (OED, 1989).<sup>7</sup> The following two examples represent the usage in contemporary English:

- (7) *He is the only person who could have got near the animal.*
- (8) *On no account let that charlatan near me!*

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7. Charter in Old English Texts 445.

The relation between the man and the animal in (7) is that of spatial proximity; however, all the sentential elements contribute to the interpretation which extends beyond the spatial arrangement. The man is the only person who can approach the animal and not be threatened by it. Thus, the spatial relation is supplemented by an additional semantic element of familiarity and confidence in line with the metaphor INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL CLOSENESS. The same physical relation of proximity between two people in (8), however, is conceptualized in an opposite way. The approaching doctor provokes the patient's negative emotional reaction who is reluctant to come into contact with him. In this way the experience of approaching danger is understood by means of physical proximity.

The Interaction Sense may be graphically represented as in Figure 4 where the interaction between the TR (the x-symbol) and the LM (the black circle) is symbolized by the left-right arrow.

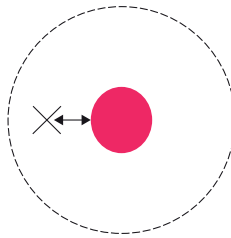


Figure 4. The Interaction Sense of the preposition *near*

#### 4.1.3 *The Approach Sense of near*

The spatial concept of proximity expressed by *near* may help us to understand situations in which we are coming closer to a particular physical, emotional or conceptual state in line with the STATES ARE LOCATIONS metaphor. The metaphor is motivated by the sensorimotor experience of being in a bounded region of space and originates when one experiences a certain state as correlated with a certain location, such as being cool under a tree or secure in bed (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 48).

One of the earliest records of the Approach Sense of *near* dates from 1558: *The people..are of complection nearer the blacke then white* (OED, 1989).<sup>8</sup> Below are typical examples of the sense in contemporary English:

- (9) *Check that all the wedding clothes are near completion.*
- (10) *Rosamund Coldharbour had been near tears, he had noticed, as he had gone into Wheeler's room.*

8. Washington Thomas, translation of *Nicholay's (N. de) Navigations into Turkie* IV.X. 122 b.

The TR in (9), *wedding clothes*, and the LM, *completion*, are related with each other by means of *near* in its Approach Sense. The LM encodes a desired state of completion which is understood as a spatial location. As the TR is not in the state yet but near it, the PATH schema emerges from the conceptualization. In (10), *near* relates the TR, Rosamund Coldharbour, and the LM, tears, in a similar way with the emotional state understood as a spatial location on a path with happy and sad values, and with the woman being proximal to the state, on the verge of tears. Even though the verbs in (9) and (10) are stative, the emerging conceptualization involve movement in line with the CHANGE IS MOTION metaphor as our experience of the world helps us understand that the TRs have moved along the path and have almost reached a certain state.

Figure 5 shows a graphic representation of the relation between the TR and LM encoded by the Approach Sense of the preposition *near*. The right pointing arrow indicates the path encoded by the Approach Sense of *near*, the x-symbol stands for the TR, the small unfilled circle represents the non-spatial nature of the LM, and the dashed circle indicates the region within which the TR can be described as being near the LM.

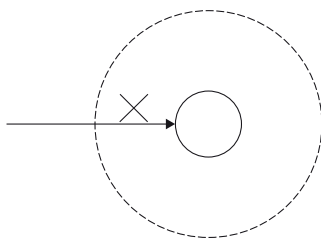


Figure 5. The Approach Sense of the preposition *near*

#### 4.1.4 *The Approximately Sense of the preposition near*

As an extension of the Approach Sense, the Approximately Sense of the preposition *near* involves the same STATES ARE LOCATIONS, SCALE and PATH schemas, but the schemas undergo certain transformations. Image schema transformations are mental operations we are able to perform, such as an ability to rotate mental images or a transformation of a two-dimensional image on a sheet of paper into a three-dimensional image in our minds (Johnson, 1987, pp. 25–26). Image schema transformations do not only concern spatial manipulations only but may also involve any modality of the human conceptual system. In other words, “we are capable of making adjustments, thereby transforming one conceptualization into another that is roughly equivalent in terms of content but differs in how this content is construed” (Langacker, 1987, p. 138).

In the Approximately Sense the *PATH* and *SCALE* schemas are more foregrounded than in the Approach Sense. The *SCALE* schema may refer to quantitative and qualitative aspects of human experience, that is, to numbers and amounts, as well as to degrees of intensity of objects and events, and it is different from the *PATH* schema in several respects (Johnson, 1987, pp. 122–123). The *SCALE* schema is directionally oriented, has a cumulative character, that is, the further along the scale we move, the more of something we have, and it is given a normative character. The *PATH* schema is usually not characterized in this way. The *STATES ARE LOCATIONS* schema undergoes a transformation too, as numerical values on the scale, and not states, are understood as physical locations in line with the metaphor *NUMBERS ARE LOCATIONS*. Thus, the preposition *near* locates the TR in the vicinity of a certain numerical value on the scale. The conceptual content of the Approximately Sense of the preposition *near* is closely associated with the one of the senses of the adverb *nearly* denoting ‘close approximation or near approach (to some state or condition, etc.)’ (OED, 1989).

The Approximately Sense of the preposition *near* encoding the concept of scale is construed with a high resolution unlike a similar sense of the preposition *at* which construes the scale with a low resolution. High resolution construals describe a given scene in fine-grain details, and, conversely, low resolution construals provide coarse-grain descriptions. The preposition *near* does not prompt for the conceptualization of the whole scale with the reference point zero and successive numerical values but only of its small fraction with a given numerical value brought to the foreground. In contrast, the preposition *at* in *These experiments had to be performed at 37 degrees Celcius* prompts for the conceptualization of the broader view of the scale and locates the TR at a particular point.

Taken together the above observations suggest that the Approximately Sense of the preposition *near* can be graphically represented as in Figure 6:

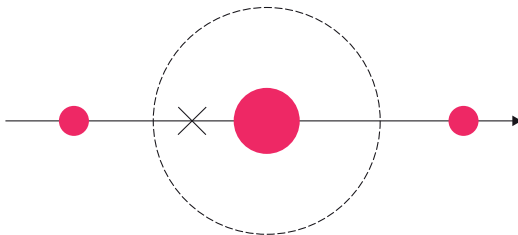


Figure 6. The Approximately Sense of the preposition *near*

In Figure 6 the horizontal arrow represents the numerical scale with values indicated by the black points. The dashed circle surrounding one of the points shows the possible area of approximation within which we could search for the TR (the x-symbol).

The earliest written record of the Approximately Sense of the preposition *near*, *He welk þat fell ner dais thre*,<sup>9</sup> dates back to before 1300 (OED, 1989). Contemporary examples illustrating the sense are quoted below:

- (11) *As growth in France's economy slows to an expected 2 per cent this year after two years near 4 per cent, (...)*
- (12) *He hadn't been dead for very long – my earlier estimate of around six hours will be somewhere near the mark.*

In sentence (11) the LM, 4 percent, constitutes a number expressed as a fraction of 100 and the TR, the growth in France's economy, is located in the vicinity of this number indicating that the growth amounts to approximately 4 per cent. Sentence (12) prompts for a similar conceptualization although the scale it evokes is of a different nature as the sentence makes clear reference to the unit of temporal measurement, an hour. The TR, the death of the person, is located at a certain moment in time estimated as six hours before the moment of speaking. The concept of approximation in the temporal domain is thus structured by virtue of TIME IS SPACE and TEMPORAL UNITS ARE LOCATIONS metaphors.

#### 4.1.5 *The Temporal Sense of the preposition near*

As an abstract entity, the concept of time is, most often than not, structured by means of the TIME IS SPACE metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, pp. 137–169) although parameters for comparing time and space are quite distinct (Evans, 2013, pp. 62–68). For instance, while the substance of space is matter with its constituent structures, such as left/right, front/back and up/down, the substance of time is action with its sequential organization. Another feature typical of time is transience, “the subjectively felt experience of temporal passage” (Evans, 2013, p. 66), which may be fast, slow or even non-existent as in *time came to a halt*.

Different aspects of space, such as units of space or their ordering, map onto units and ordering of time, but the regular projections established by metaphor theory also involve other mental spaces which produce emergent structure. Essentially, we project our subjective experience of time and events to the concept of time. This is why expressions such as *Minutes are quick but hours are slow* (Fauconnier

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9. Cursor Mundi 3155 (The Cursor of the world) *A Northumbrian poem of the 14th century in four versions* 13., 14..



& Turner, 2004, p. 55), in which different time units move with different speed, are possible. Subjective temporal experience projected to the concept of time results in certain discrepancies between the two domains. For instance, units of space are not moving objects and they are not always on the same path, while units of time may move or be stationary on the same timeline.

Being an extension of the In-the-vicinity Sense, the Temporal Sense of the preposition *near* encodes the TR located proximal to the LM in the temporal domain. The LM is frequently instantiated by temporal phrases, such as *morning*, *end of September*, *beginning of the century*, *the end*, *an exam*, etc. The Temporal Sense of the preposition *near* was first recorded around 1300 in the sentence *It sal be nere þe worldes end* (OED, 1989).<sup>10</sup> The sentences below illustrate the sense in contemporary English:

(13) *Most Greek religious festivals occurred at or near full moon (...)*

(14) *It was getting near Christmas and we were both under pressure to get orders completed.*

Sentence (13) encodes two explicit events – the TR, Greek religious festivals, and the LM, the full moon. It also encodes, although implicitly, the experiencer located “here and now” and looking back at the events which occurred in the past. The concept of physical path is transferred to the domain of time and the events are stationary on the timeline. The experiencer is able to register temporal coincidence and proximity of religious festivals and the lunar phase of full moon encoded by the prepositions *at* and *near* respectively. Sentence (13) encodes the sequential temporal frame of reference where the two events are ordered with respect to one another (Evans, 2013, pp. 114–126).

Likewise, sentence (14) encodes the notion of path transferred to the domain of time and it prompts for the conceptualization of the LM, Christmas, as a stationary event on the timeline. The TR, it, refers to the human experience of reality which seems to be moving towards the holiday. The experiencer is located in a certain spatial-temporal point from which he observes the motion. Sentence (14) encodes the so-called deictic temporal frame of reference which anchors the temporal events in our subjective experience of asymmetry of time (Evans, 2013, pp. 82–113).

The following schematization of the The Temporal Sense of the preposition *near* may be suggested:

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10. Cursor Mundi 518023 (The Cursor of the world) *A Northumbrian poem of the 14th century in four versions* 13, 14.

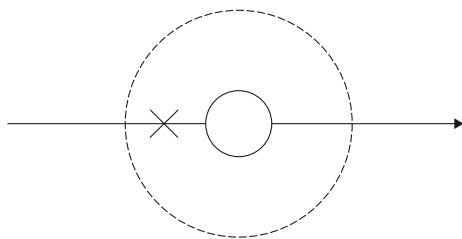


Figure 7. The Temporal Sense of the preposition *near*

In Figure 7 the right pointing arrow represents the timeline, the small unfilled circle represents the LM, while the dashed circle marks the time span proximal to the LM. The x-symbol stands for the TR either stationary or approaching the LM when the linguistic units prompt for dynamic temporal conceptualizations.

## 4.2 The senses of the complex preposition *near to*

### 4.2.1 *The primary sense of the complex preposition near to*

The complex preposition *near to* was first recorded almost five centuries later than the simple preposition *near*, around 1250, in the sentence *Laban cam to ðat welle ner* (OED, 1989)<sup>11</sup> which can be paraphrased as ‘Laban came near to that well.’ Sentence (17) is a contemporary example of the In-the-vicinity Sense:

- (15) ‘Where’s the fresh meat we were promised?’ a man standing near to Ruth called out.

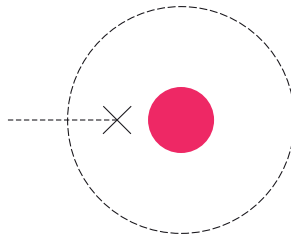
In the fashion similar to the In-the-vicinity Sense of the simple preposition *near*, *near to* in (15) encodes the off-stage vantage point. The observer looking at the spatial scene sees the TR, the man, proximal to the LM, Ruth, and located in the region surrounding her. The conceptual blending analysis of *near to* sketched below suggests that the primary sense of *near to* integrates semantic structures from the ‘near’ and ‘to’ mental spaces giving an emergent structure ONE OBJECT PROXIMAL TO ANOTHER AND AT THE END OF A PATH. The preposition *to* emphasizes the end point of the path connecting the man and Ruth. This is clearly seen when the *to* element is removed from the sentence:

- (16) ‘Where’s the fresh meat we were promised?’ a man standing near Ruth called out.

11. Genesis & Exodus 1395.

In (16), both the TR, *a man*, and the LM, *Ruth*, participate in a symmetrical spatial relation, that is, the man is near Ruth and, conversely, Ruth is near the man. The preposition *near* does not encode any specific orientation of the man and Ruth. The *to* element in (15) is thus directional and it introduces an additional semantic element of the endpoint of the path.

Figure 8 is a graphic representation of the spatial relation encoded by the complex preposition *near to*. The dashed line symbolizes the path present in the conceptualization, while the x-symbol at the end of the path indicates the proximal position of the TR relative to the LM (the black circle) within a certain region (the dashed circle).



**Figure 8.** The primary sense of the preposition *near to*

The complex preposition *near to* consists of the adverb or adjective *near*, which is usually relatively stressed, and the simple preposition *to* (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 669). The semantics of this complex lexical unit may be seen as a function of the semantics of its constituent parts *near* and *to*. The two words activate at least four mental spaces, “small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p. 40), that is, two input spaces of *near* and *to*, one generic space, which evokes any kind of relation between two objects, and one blended space with the generic structure as well as selected conceptual structures from the two input spaces. The input space for *near* may include:

- one object proximal to another
- one object interacts with another
- one object approaches another
- one object approximates another
- one object proximal to another in time

The input space for *to* may evoke the following selected semantic elements (OED, 1989):

- path from one object to another (e.g. *It's eleven miles (from Oxford) to Witney*)
- one object moves towards another and reaches it (e.g. *take the child to his mother's house*)
- one object located at the end of the path (e.g. *He pointed to a clump of trees*)
- one object in contact with another (e.g. *Applying plenty of yellow soap to the towel*)
- one object facing another (e.g. *They stood face to face*)
- one object reaches another (e.g. *The thermometer has risen to above 32 degrees*)
- one object in close proximity to another (e.g. *I sit down to table; but I cannot eat*)
- one object located at the end of a timeline (e.g. *The business hours ... were from ten to six*)

A very basic meaning integration model involving *near* and *to* may be the following. The generic space projects the concept of a relation between two objects to the input and blended spaces. The primary sense of the preposition *near to* emerges when a cross-space mapping between 'one object proximal to another' in the *near* space and 'one object located at the end of the path' in the *to* space results in the blended structure ONE OBJECT PROXIMAL TO ANOTHER AND LOCATED AT THE END OF A PATH. The Interaction Sense of *near to* is a result of a cross-domain mapping between 'one object interacts with another' from the *near* input space and 'one object directed towards another' from the *to* input space. The emerging conceptual blend UNIDIRECTIONAL INTERACTION BETWEEN TWO OBJECTS contains the structures projected indirectly from the generic space and directly from the two input spaces. The Approach Sense of *near to* emerges when the structure 'one object approaches another' from the *near* input space is mapped onto 'one object located at the end of the path' and 'one object directed towards another' resulting in the blend ONE OBJECT APPROACHES ANOTHER ALONG A PATH AND IS LOCATED AT THE END OF THE PATH. The Approximately Sense involves the mapping of the structure 'one object approximates another' onto 'one object located at the end of the path' which results in the ONE OBJECT APPROXIMATES ANOTHER AND IS LOCATED AT THE END OF THE PATH blended structure. Finally, the Temporal Sense selects the 'one object proximal to another in time' and 'one object located at the end of the timeline' structures resulting in ONE OBJECT PROXIMAL TO ANOTHER AND AT THE END OF A TIMELINE.

Figure 9 below shows the graphic representation of the blend NEAR TO. The large circles represent concepts of different levels of schematicity – the most general is the SPATIAL RELATION BETWEEN TWO OBJECTS concept projecting its structure (straight lines) to the more specific NEAR and TO concepts. The black points in Input 1 and 2 represent distinct semantic elements (senses) in the semantic structures of *near* and *to*. While the *near* input space contains five distinct senses, all of which participate in the blend, the *to* input space contains a considerable number of senses

which do not participate in the blend. For the sake of clarity, Figure 5 represents only two senses in Input 2, ‘one object facing another’ and ‘one object in contact with another,’ which do not contribute to the emergent structure, but, in fact, there are many more. The straight lines connecting the points are cross-space mappings connecting counterparts in the two spaces. The further projection of the connected senses of *near* and *to* to the blended space NEAR TO is marked by the dashed lines.

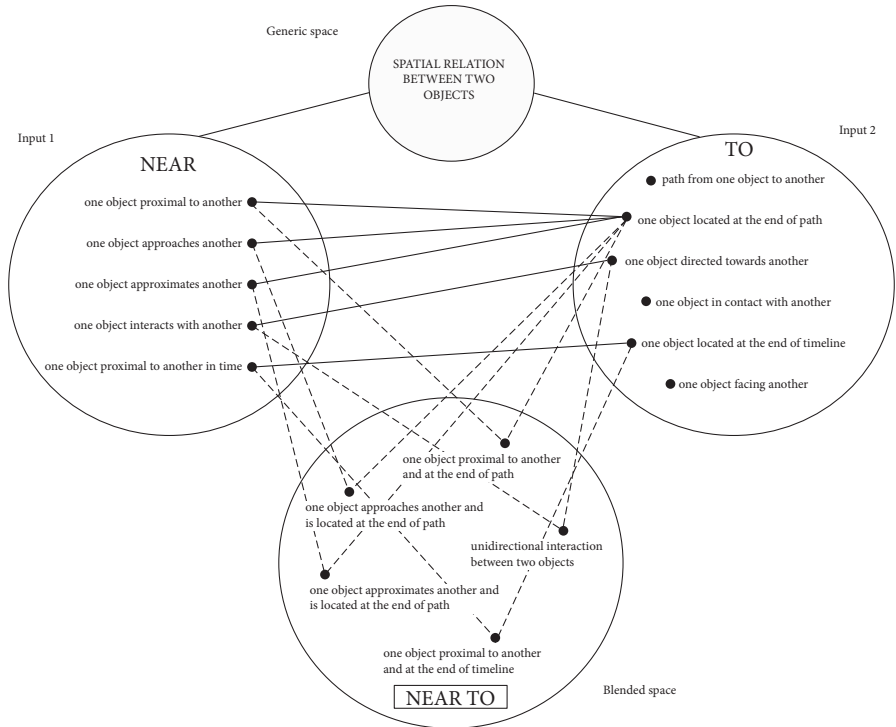


Figure 9. The blended structure *near to*

#### 4.2.2 The Interaction Sense of the preposition *near to*

The INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL CLOSENESS metaphor is also evoked in the Interaction Sense of the complex preposition *near to*. As mentioned above, this sense is a conceptual blend of the semantic structures ‘one object interacts with another’ from the *near* input space and ‘one object directed towards another’ from the *to* input space.

One of the earliest records of the Interaction Sense comes from 1450: *Y saide, she was bothe good and faire, but she shulde be to me no nere than she was* (OED, 1989).<sup>12</sup> The following sentence illustrates the use in contemporary English:

12. Knight de la Tour-Landry *The book of the ...* around 1450 (1868).

- (17) *To his surprise, the strongest argument in favour of taking the job had been that it would keep him near to Frances.*

Sentence (17) suggests proximity between the TR, him, and the LM, Frances. The man hopes for possible frequent contact and broadly understood interaction with Frances. The particle *to* makes the relationship between the TR and LM asymmetric introducing the element of directionality of the TR into the conceptualization. That is, although the man wants to interact with Frances, it is not clear whether Frances reciprocates the wish.

Figure 10 represents TR-LM relation encoded by the Interaction Sense of the complex structure *near to*.

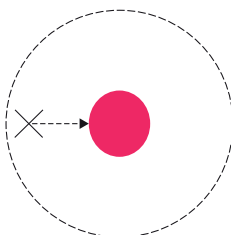


Figure 10. The Interaction Sense of the preposition *near to*

The x-symbol represents the TR located close to the LM (the black circle) and trying to establish a relationship with it within a certain region (the dashed circle). The unidirectional character of the interaction, imposed on the conceptualization by the *to* particle, is marked by the right pointing arrow.

#### 4.2.3 *The Approach Sense of near to*

The Approach Sense of *near to* makes use of the STATES ARE LOCATIONS metaphor and it encodes the TR coming closer to the LM, constituting a particular physical, emotional or conceptual state, in line with the CHANGE IS MOTION metaphor. This sense emerges when the structure ‘one object approaches another’ from the *near* mental space is blended with the structure ‘one object located at the end of the path’ and ‘one object directed towards another’ from the *to* space.

In 1548 we find one of the early examples of the sense in *He came verai nere to man, bothe seeyng and beeyng seen* (OED, 1989).<sup>13</sup> The contemporary example in (20) is illustrative of the sense:

13. Udall Nicolas *Apophthegmes, that is to saie, prompte saiynge*. First gathered by Erasmus Luke X.93b, translation.

(18) *Speculative, as you say, but I think it's as near to the truth as we're going to get.*

In (18) the LM, the truth, represents a desirable state of affairs. However, the TR, what we know about a situation, will probably never reach the desirable state. The difference between the conceptualizations prompted for by the simple preposition *near* and the complex structure *near to* rests on the semantic structure of end of the path encoded by the particle *to*. This relation is schematically diagrammed in Figure 11:

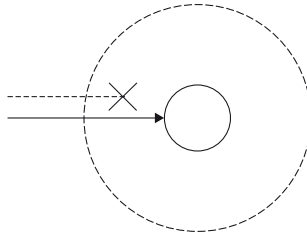


Figure 11. The Approach Sense of the preposition *near to*

In Figure 11 the right pointing arrow indicates the scale encoded by the Approach Sense of *near to*, the unfilled circle represents a non-spatial LM with the region proximal to it marked by the large dashed circle. The dashed line symbolizes the notion of path contributed to the conceptualization by the preposition *to*. The x-symbol at the end of the path is the TR located at the endpoint of the path.

#### 4.2.4 *The Approximately Sense of the preposition near to*

The PATH, SCALE and NUMBERS ARE LOCATIONS metaphors also structure the Approximately Sense of the preposition *near to* in the fashion similar to that of *near*. Sentence (19) is a typical example of the sense:

(19) *This time last year Bulmers shares were at 170p, today they are near to 260p.*

In (19) the TR, the price of Bulmers shares, is estimated at about 260p. The different values of the shares are conceptualized as locations on the path. The concept of scale is prompted for by the ordered values resulting in the directional orientation of the scale. The preposition *near* prompts for the concept of estimation in the conceptualization, whereas the preposition *to* contributes the semantic structure 'one object located at the end of the path.'

Thus, the graphical representation of the relation between the TR and LM encoded by the Approximately Sense of the preposition *near to* is given in Figure 12:

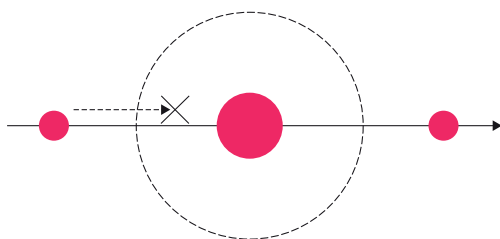


Figure 12. The Approximately Sense of the preposition *near to*

Figure 12 is a modification of Figure 6 in one respect. The dashed arrow, absent from Figure 6, represents the movement from lower to higher values on the scale encoded by the constituent *to*.

#### 4.2.5 *The Temporal Sense of near to*

The Temporal Sense of *near to* encodes similar conceptualization as the Temporal Sense of *near* with the additional contribution of the semantics of *to*. Thus, *near to* evokes the TIME IS SPACE metaphor and the subjective experience of time. Sentence (20) illustrates the usage:

(20) *You're coming near to the end of your shift.*

In (20) the experiencer is located “here and now”, a spatial-temporal point from which he observes the events. The end of the shift, the LM, is conceptualized as a point on a path, and the TR, you, is the entity moving in time in relation to the fixed LM. The preposition *near to* prompts for the conceptualization of the TR coming closer to the LM and located at the end of the path encoded by *to*.

The graphic representation of the relation between the TR and LM encoded by the Temporal Sense is slightly modified with respect to that encoded by *near*:

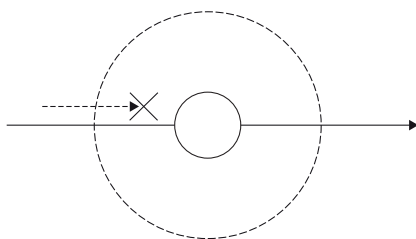


Figure 13. The Temporal Sense of the preposition *near to*

In Figure 13 the right pointing, solid arrow symbolizes the timeline going from past, through present to future. The unfilled circle represents the temporal LM, and



the x-symbol at the end of the dashed arrow symbolizes the TR in the vicinity of the endpoint of the path. The TR is located within the dashed circle constituting a certain period of time proximal to the LM.

## 5. The adverb *near*

Even though the grammatical classification of prepositions and adverbs is a problematic matter, on the conceptual level they both designate atemporal relations and are distinguished on the basis of individual TR/LM organizations they encode (Langacker, 2008, pp. 115–117). Adverbs are different from prepositions as they involve only one focal participant, that is the TR constituted by a relation, that is an event, while prepositions involve both the TR, constituted by a thing or a relation. For example, the word *near* in *an attractive girl in jeans hovered near* locates the girl's hovering at the positive end of a distance measuring scale and it grants the activity focal prominence of the TR. On the other hand, *near* in *CERN, Europe's center near Geneva* gives Europe's center the primary focal prominence, that is, the TR status, and Geneva the LM status. However, the adverb *near* also suggests an implicit LM determined by the context in which the expression is used (see the discussion of (23) below.) The semantic difference between prepositions and adverbs is reflected at the grammatical level by virtue of the presence or absence of complementation respectively.

### 5.1 The senses of the adverb *near*

Table 4 shows the frequencies for the adverb *near*. In the database of 2172 sentences collected for the purpose of the present study the adverb *near* occurs 166 times. The analysis reveals the existence of four adverbial senses – The In-the-vicinity Sense occurring 56 times in the sample, the Interaction Sense with 9 occurrences, the Approach Sense with 89 and the Temporal Sense with 12.

**Table 4.** The frequency of occurrence for the adverb *near*

Sense	Number of occurrences per 166
The In-the-vicinity Sense	56
The Interaction Sense	9
The Approach Sense	89
The Temporal Sense	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>

### 5.1.1 *The In-the-vicinity Sense*

One of the earliest records of the adverb *near* is *Forð near ætstop* (OED, 1989)<sup>14</sup> meaning ‘forward near he approached.’ An equally early quotation, dated from 888, comes from King Aelfred’s *Boethius De consolatione philosophiae – a eode se Wisdom near ...* (And she drew nearer unto my grieving intelligence) (OED, 1989) – where the adverb *near* is used more metaphorically. Although it seems that the majority of early citations in the OED (1989) contain the adverb, we cannot be sure whether a given word is a preposition, an adverb or a separable prefix due to considerable overlap between the word classes in Old English which allowed prepositions to appear between their complements and verbs (Lundskær-Nielsen, 1993, p. 19). The results of the present research show however that in contemporary English the preposition *near* is much more frequent than the adverb.

The difference between prepositions and adverbs rests on the reference objects they encode. While prepositions typically encode two focal elements, the more prominent TR and the more backgrounded LM, adverbs encode only TRs conceptualized as, for instance, actions (Langacker, 2013, p. 116).

- (21) *A slim attractive girl in jeans hovered near, her pose suggesting I could approach her.*

The adverb *near* provides additional information about the girl’s action of hovering specifying that it was carried out in the vicinity. Although the LM is not explicitly encoded, *near* suggests the existence of a reference entity in relation to which the distance could be assessed. The pronoun *I* in the second part of the sentence prompts for the conceptualization of such a reference.

### 5.1.2 *The Interaction Sense*

One of the early records of the Interaction Sense of the adverb *near*, *His inymyes.. pressit him sa nere that outhir him behufit to be slayne or ellis to leve the barne*, is dated from 1456 (OED, 1989).<sup>15</sup> The contemporary example is given in (22):

- (22) *Let us rejoice in the Lord always, in the midst of everyday life, for the Lord is always near.*

The concept of spatial proximity encoded by the In-the-vicinity Sense of the adverb is metaphorically transferred to the domain of human interaction in line with the metaphor INTIMACY IS PHYSICAL CLOSENESS, as was the case with the Interaction Sense of the preposition. Thus, the Lord is conceptualized as being close to and

14. Beowulf 745.

15. Haye, Sir Gilbert *The buke of the law of armys or buke of bataillis* 204, 1456.

protective of His people. The adverb *near* modifies the verb *be* characterizing the presence of the Lord as proximal. The LM is not explicitly mentioned in (22); however, it is understood that the faithful, over whom the Lord watches, constitute the reference objects with regard to which the presence of the Lord is assessed.

### 5.1.3 *The Approach Sense*

As adverbs do not encode the LM, there is no possibility to see whether the adverb *near* makes reference to states or numerical values. This distinction is the basis for establishing separate prepositional Approach and Approximately senses which, in the case of the adverb, merge into one Approach Sense. In the collected database the adverb modifies adjectives (*the near universal experience, a near vertical climb, near discordant notes*) and verbs (*we were near deluding ourselves, it'll damn near cut you in two*).

One of the early uses of the sense comes from 1526 – *No religyon is found hytherto ye nere representeth yt primityue chirche of Chryst* (OED, 1989).<sup>16</sup> In the contemporary examples given below the adverb modifies the adjective in (23) and the verb in (24):

(23) *A representative assembly is a near universal feature of modern western democracies.*

(24) *Did a man near kill himself?*

In (23) and (24) the adverb *near* could be replaced by *nearly* meaning ‘with close approximation or near approach (to some state or condition, etc.’ and ‘within a (very) little; almost, all but’ (OED, 1989). This suggests that the state expressed by the adjective *universal* is almost reached and the action expressed by the verb *kill* almost happened. Specifically, the representative assembly in (23) is characterized as being located in the positive end of the scale of universality, while the man in (24) endangered his life to such an extent that he came close to losing his life. In other words, the adverb *near* prompts for the conceptualization of a standard, norm, or state which is a little short of the desired value or of an action which is not quite accomplished. Thus, the adverb *near* profiles the concept of SCALE and the STATES ARE LOCATIONS metaphor in the fashion similar to that of the preposition.

### 5.1.4 *The Temporal Sense*

The Temporal Sense of the adverb *near* is a result of the metaphorical transfer from the domain of space to the domain of time in line with the metaphor TIME

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16. *Pilgrimage. The pylgremage of perfection* 1526.

IS SPACE. This sense was first recorded around 1300 in *þe time es nu comand nere* (OED, 1989)<sup>17</sup> and a contemporary example is given in (25):

(25) *Sukova said she hoped the competitive end was not near for Navratilova.*

The presence of the competitive end in (25) is described as not being near. The sentence conceptualizes the timeline with the subjectively felt past, present and future and the conceptualization locates the observer in a spatial/temporal point of “here and now.” The observer understands that the end of Navratilova’s career is not upcoming for her. As the events happened in the past, the sentence is characterized by the property of occurrence (Evans, 2013, p. 83).

## 6. The adjective *near*

The frequency of occurrence for the adjective *near* in the collected database is presented in Table 5. The adjective *near* in an attributive function appears in 131 out of 2172 sentences. The most numerous is the Temporal Sense with 59 occurrences, next comes the In-the-vicinity Sense with 37, the Approach Sense with 29, and the Interaction Sense with 6 instances of use.

Table 5. The frequency of occurrence for the adjective *near*

Sense	Number of occurrences per 131
The In-the-vicinity Sense	37
The Interaction Sense	6
The Approach Sense	29
The Temporal Sense	59
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>

Adjectives differ from prepositions in encoding, like adverbs, only one focal participant, the TR. They differ from adverbs in the nature of the TRs they encode. As adjectives typically modify nouns, things usually function as adjectival TRs (Langacker, 2013, pp. 115–116). The first three adjectival senses of *near* listed in OED (1989) involve intimacy, friendship and affection between people. The adjective can be used to describe a relation – “closely related by blood or kinship”, a person – “closely attached to, very intimate or familiar with, another” and friendship – “close, intimate, familiar.” One of the early examples of the Interaction Sense,

17. *Cursor Mundi (The Cursor of the world). A Northumbrian poem of the 14th century in four versions.* 18023 (Gött).

*Sant iohan þat was his sibe ner kines-man* (OED, 1989),<sup>18</sup> dates back to around 1300, while the contemporary instances in the collected database include *a near relation*, *a very near kinsman* and *a near neighbour*.

The adjective *near* also encodes TRs which are spatial in nature. The earliest example of this kind was recorded in 1565 in the sentence *For that was the next nere water, which he could conueniently use for baptism* (OED, 1989).<sup>19</sup> Sentence (26) illustrates the contemporary usage of the sense:

- (26) *The girl moved a little closer to the man, who put his hand ponderously, patriarchally, on her near shoulder.*

The adjective *near* selects as its TR the noun *shoulder* prompting for the conceptualization of the shoulder proximal to the man. Other expressions with the adjective *near* in the In-the-vicinity Sense found in the collected database include *the Near East*, *the near bank*, *the near vision* and *the near side*.

The adjective *near* characterizing spatial TRs may also denote ‘the left-hand side’ (OED, 1989). In this way *near* was frequently used about animals due to the fact that horses or cattle are commonly mounted, approached or led from the left side which is consequently near the person dealing with them. This usage was later extended to horses in cart-wheels and, finally, to motor vehicles. In countries where one drives on the right, the *near side* refers to the right-hand side.

The Approach Sense of the adjective *near* selects as its TR a state, condition or goal as in *near certainty*, *near ellipse*, *near pandemonium*. The OED (1989) explains such usage of the adjective *near* as ‘close, narrow, in various applications.’ In sentence (27), for example, the adjective *near* encodes the state of starvation as its TR indicating that the state was almost reached.

- (27) *A US-trained officer, 48-year-old General Hakim is the most experienced convoy trouble-shooter in the regime, having organized the relief convoy to the besieged city of Khost two years ago and saved Kabul from near starvation last year.*

In line with TIME IS SPACE metaphor the adjective *near* is also used with temporal TRs. With 59 instances in the collected database, it is the most frequent sense of the adjective; however, it is instantiated by only two expressions – *the near future*, appearing 59 times, and *near time* used only once. OED (1989) cites one more example of the sense – the expression *near-term* is used as an equivalent of *short-term* in *This ... certainly does not suggest near-term improvement*.

18. *Cursor Mundi (The Cursor of the world)*. A Northumbrian poem of the 14th century in four versions. 20068 (Gött.).

19. Stapleton Thomas *Bede's History of the Church of England* 68, translation.

## 7. The verb *near*

The verb *near* occurs in only three sentences in the database of 2172. These are:

(28) *I don't just near the cabbage*

(29) *as they near the Sargasso ...*

(30) *As you near the end of your first video safari*

The verb *near* was first recorded in 1513 in *The swipir Tuscan hund assais And nerys fast*<sup>20</sup> and it could be paraphrased as ‘approach, draw or come near’ (OED 1989). In sentences (28), (29) and (30), the verb *near* constitutes a metonymic extension of the preposition (Radden & Kövecses, 2007[1998], pp. 335–359). Specifically, (28) and (29) illustrate the SPATIAL RELATION FOR ACTIVITY LEADING TO THIS RELATION metonymy, where the proximal relation between two objects is extended to denote the activity resulting in the relation, whereas (30) is an example of TIME IS ACTION metonymy, where the relation of temporal proximity between the two entities starts to denote the action causing such relation.

Encoding dynamic spatial scenes, the verb *near* evokes the category of force dynamics in the fashion similar to other verbs of motion. Force dynamics refers to different types of object interaction with respect to force, specifically, the exertion of force, resistance to such force, overcoming the resistance, blockage of the expression of force, removal of blockage, etc. (Talmy, 2000, pp. 409–468). Sentences (28) and (29) make reference to people in motion towards the LMs. The gravitation force pulls them down to the surface of the Earth, and as they draw closer to their LMs, they produce kinetic energy which is responsible for initiating the movement and acceleration. They also overcome the resistance of the air which increases in direct proportion to their speed.

## 8. Conclusion

The present study attempts to describe the semantic structure of the word *near*. The sample of 2172 sentences containing the word *near* was analyzed in terms of semantic content the word can encode. In general, the word *near* makes reference to the concept of spatial proximity which can be transferred to other non-spatial domains. To explain different sense extensions in the semantic network of the word *near* the notions of construal, image schema transformation, metaphor and metonymy were used.

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20. Douglas Gavin *AENEIS* XII, xii. 147.

In order to explain the difference between the simple preposition *near* and the complex preposition *near to*, the conceptual blending theory was used (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Although undeniably semantically similar to one another, the two structures encode different meaning components once again showing that absolute synonymy is a rare linguistic phenomenon. Specifically, the preposition *to* contributes the PATH, END OF PATH and DIRECTIONALITY meaning components to the semantic content of the complex preposition *near to*.

The analysis reveals that the word *near* belongs to lexical as well as grammatical word classes which supports the case for its morpholexical treatment in line with the statement that “[adpositions] elements allegedly belonging to grammar, (...) also belong to the lexicon” (Hagège, 2010, p. 332). Although *near* is a member of prepositional, adverbial, adjectival and verbal categories, its prepositional usage is by far the most common in the collected database as it amounts to about 80 percent of all uses. In the prepositional category spatial uses are also the most frequent amounting to 90 percent of all instances. With only five different senses, the polysemy of the word *near* is relatively limited when compared to other highly polysemous prepositions, such as *in* (Cuyckens, 1993; Herskovits, 1986; Navarro-Ferrando, 2000), *on* (Dirven, 1993; Herskovits, 1986; Navarro-Ferrando, 1999) *at* (Herskovits, 1986; Kokorniak, 2007; Navarro-Ferrando, 2002) or *over* (Brenda, 2014; Brugman, 1988; Lakoff, 1987; Deane, 2005).

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