

## Multimodality and Construction Grammar – A Case Study of the *this close to* Construction

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Human face-to-face communication is multimodal in nature. It involves the use of much more than words only. While sometimes the desired meaning can be achieved through the verbal medium alone, in many cases, it is necessary to resort to a co-speech gesture. An interesting challenge thus is modeling multimodal phenomena in a Construction Grammar framework (Goldberg, 2006; 2019). Recently, many researchers have made proposals to account for such phenomena (Cienki, 2017; Herbst, 2020; Hoffmann, 2017; Mittelberg, 2017; Schoonjans, 2017; Turner, 2018; 2020a; 2020b; Uhrig, 2021; Ziem, 2017; Zima, 2017; Zima and Bergs 2017). One point of agreement seems to be that communication is multimodal, but constructions are not necessarily.

The aim of this presentation is to present a case study for a construction that represents a strong candidate for a multimodal construction, in the sense proposed by Ziem (2017), i.e., both the verbal and kinetic forms are argued to make one formal unit that is paired with a particular meaning/function. The proposed construction is *this close to* as in “Downtown got *this close to* breaking the record”<sup>1</sup>. In such contexts, the verbal form is observed to frequently co-occur with a prototypical hand gesture – the index finger and the thumb make a crooked shape (Bressemer, 2013). While it may be argued that the frequent use of the gesture is due to the deictic word *this*, it will be argued here that the gesture is likely to be entrenched with the larger chunk *this close to*, given that linguistic knowledge is grounded in experience.

This raises several questions. (i) Can the frequency of co-occurrence and collostructional attraction serve as evidence for multimodal constructions? (ii) Is there evidence for the association of a gesture with a large chunk? (iii) Are there instances of use where the gesture is not needed? (iv) If yes, are they functionally different from those where it is needed? (v) What concord do the findings of this study have on current versions of Construction Grammar?

The data for this study has been extracted from the UCLA Library Broadcast NewsScape (Steen and Turner 2016) and the following analyses are being carried out, (i) a frequency analysis and a collostructional analysis (Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2003) to determine the rate of co-occurrence and the strength of attraction between the verbal form and the gestural form; (ii) a gesture timing analysis to see when the gesture usually starts, for how long the speaker holds it, and when it ends; and (iii) a semantic analysis of the meanings expressed by the construction. It is expected that the verbal and gestural forms exhibit a high rate of co-occurrence frequency as well as a strong collostructional attraction; that the gesture would be held throughout the entire duration of uttering *this close to*; and that the construction is likely to be associated with a negative semantic preference.

**Keywords:** Construction Grammar, Co-speech Gesture, Multimodal Construction, Collostructional Analysis

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<sup>1</sup> 2016-04-18\_0600\_US\_KABC\_Eyewitness\_News

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