

PROXIMITY IN ENGLISH AND LITHUANIAN

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The article sets out to disclose the semantic structure of the spatial prepositions of proximity by and beside in English and šalia, greta and ties in Lithuanian.

The paper argues that proximity covers a wide range of spatial relations. More specifically, the above prepositions refer to different types of spatial organisation: regional and non-regional. The first type covers at least two subtypes of regions: qualitatively functional (by) and geometrical region (ties). Within non-regional spatial organisation, two varieties seem to be relevant: sequence in space (šalia) and row-type organisation of entities (beside, greta). Cross-linguistically, the prepositions under study in most cases manifest partial overlap of meaning.

Introduction

Proximity is a very general term often used in the explication of a group of locatives, and prepositions in particular. It is widely employed by many linguists (Cienki 1989; Dirven 1993; Maljar & Seliverstova 1998; Šukys 1998; Valiulytė 1998; Talmy 1988; Taylor 1993 and many others¹). The understanding of the term differs from author to author, several of them employ the terms *close connection* and *environmental union*.

This paper focuses on the semantic description of some prepositions of proximity: *by* (*by the fire*), *beside* (*She was sitting beside the driver*) in English and *šalia* (*Šalia kelio karčema*—‘An inn beside the road’), *greta* (*Ji atsisotojo greta savo vyro*—‘She stood beside her husband’), *ties* (*Ties bedugne*—‘At the abyss’) in Lithuanian. The cross-linguistic study of the above spatial expressions has been instigated by several reasons.

Prepositions primarily specify spatial relations. Since space is a fundamental space category, prepositions, as closed-class elements, serve as organising structure for further conceptual material, hence the relevance of the study of their semantics (see Regier 1995). A huge interest in their semantics has resulted in interesting one-language and cross-linguistic analyses. Cognitive linguistics has helped resolve such cases in English as the *water in the vase* (=in the interior of the vase), *the crack in the vase* (=in the surface of the vase) (examples taken from Herskovits 1988, 275); in English vs Lithuanian vs Russian: *the bird in the tree* (the tree as a container) vs *paukštis medyje gieda* (‘the bird in the tree is singing’—the tree is conceptualised as a container) vs *ptička na dereve* (‘the bird on the tree’—the

¹ See the bibliography to Šeškauskienė 2001.

tree is seen not as a whole, but as having branches for the birds to sit on – the relation of support). Many of these highlight social, cultural etc. context of the speakers of language community.

The importance of space conceptualisation in interpreting the semantics of locatives has been highlighted by Zelinsky-Wibbelt (1993, 4): 'Prepositions are highly representative of the nature of linguistic meaning: conceptualisation in this paradigm comprises linguistic meaning, or, put the other way round, linguistic interpretation equates with conceptualization'

Moreover, space conceptualisation in the semantics of prepositions is based on several layers: universal and idiosyncratic, or language specific. Language universal features stem from our common world surrounding us (encyclopaedic knowledge, see Taylor 1995, 81-98), whereas idiosyncrasies might occur due to a variety of reasons concerned with the native speakers' common historic, cultural, political etc. background. These intricacies are best revealed in contrastive studies. Spatial and temporal relations, metonymy and metaphor, when studied cross-linguistically, produce quite unexpected results (see Dirven 1993; Taylor 1993).

The present semantic investigation has been inspired by two more factors: cross-referential and hence insufficient lexicographic definitions and very productive synonymy.

Thus, many contemporary dictionaries offer a cross-referential explication of meaning. For example, the preposition *by* is described as 'near, beside or past'; *beside* – 'next to, at the side of' (CIDE 1998); *greta* – 'šalia, palei'; *šalia* – 'netoli, greta' (DLKŽ 2000). In addition, many Lithuanian dictionaries rely on intuitive explication, not supported by any corpus data, which in many cases does not reflect the actual usage tendencies². Some investigators point out that dictionary definitions are pedagogically deficient (Boers and Demecheleer 1998).

The other factor is synonymy, and it is very productive with locatives, e.g. *by*, *beside*, *near*, *nearby*, *at* in English; *šalia*, *prie*, *greta*, *palei*, *ties* in Lithuanian; *vozle*, *riadom*, *nedaleko*, *nepodalioku* in Russian etc. – all seem to designate proximity. At the language user's level, their meaning differences are intuitive, not fully perceived. Therefore, the investigator's aim is to disclose them without failure to observe the language economy principle.

Materials and methods

The materials for the present study have been collected from the Internet corpora – the English data from the Sara corpus of the BNC, and the Lithuanian data – from the donelaitis corpus³. A small part of the data has been taken from other sources, mainly newspapers and fiction. The total number of instances under investigation is about 500 for each preposition.

For the present investigation, the following methods were used: hypothetical deduction, componential analysis and linguistic experiment. The first was taken as the most general method, the scheme of which is almost universally applied in any scientific investigation.

Componential analysis is the term that has been amply used by linguists for almost half a century. As for its applicability for the analysis of prepositions, it is exhaustively described in Cienki (1989, 10-11). The method does not seem to be favoured by many cognitive linguists; however, the criticism is mainly addressed to its classical form developed by Katz and Fodor, Nida and some other linguists of the sixties of last century (for further details see Taylor 1995, 29-37). In its modern modification,

² Corpus-based and corpus-driven approaches are comparatively new in Lithuania, but obviously have found their own niche (for further details see Marcinkevičienė 2002).

³ If not indicated otherwise, all the examples have been taken from either of the two corpora.

however, componential analysis does not seem to be totally unacceptable (cf. Cruse 2000). This might be concerned with a modified, much broader, understanding of the concept of a component itself. In the present investigation, componential analysis refers to the principle of decomposability of meaning. It does not seem to violate the encyclopaedic approach to meaning favoured by cognitivists.

Linguistic experiment, as a method of verification, involves reference to the actual usage of a linguistic unit by native speakers and helps establish the validity of the hypothesis. Its application is based on the predictive force of the postulated meaning and results in producing positive and, particularly valuable, negative evidence (for further details see Seliverstova 1976 and Regier 1995, 66).

Before setting out to discuss the results of the investigation, there are some basic terms to be clarified. Y refers to the reference object/entity, *Relatum* (the latter term has been borrowed from Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976), whereas X is the entity to be located in relation to Y (cf. Landmark and Trajector in cognitive grammar – Langacker 1988; Taylor 1995).

Space is a metalinguistic concept, which apart from physical space also designates temporal space, space of oral discourse etc (cf. mental space in Fauconnier's (1985) understanding). This paper focuses mainly on physical space, which has been accepted by psychologists and linguists as prior to all other types of space.

Results and discussion

***BY* and *BESIDE*.** For the explication of meanings of *by* and *beside* proximity seems to be by far too general term. *Lateral proximity*, a more specific term, (Lindkvist 1976, 266), is only applicable to the meaning of *beside*, which is concerned with non-regional space organisation. In the meaning of *by*, however, proximity is an outcome of regional space organisation.

***BY*.** Dirven (1989, 527-8) suggests that the main idea for the explication of the meaning of *by* is a close connection between two objects; the closeness suggests a connection. The idea seems to be working only if the connection is interpreted in terms of *region* (the term is used in Maljar and Seliverstova (1998, 255) and Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976)), the key concept in the explication of the meaning of *by*. The region is understood as a segment of space singled out from and in respect to Y—the main organising centre of the local utterance. In one of the meanings of *by*, a qualitative type of region is realised; Y and its region are related to each other in that Y imposes its features/qualities, exerts influence or exercises control over X. It can be interpreted in possessive terms, with possessivity understood in its broadest meaning (cf. Cienki 1995). Laterality in this context is irrelevant.

The peculiarities of the region are determined by the features of Y. In *by*, Y forms its region by being the source of light, heat, warmth or by performing a pragmatic function. Hence the productivity of the combinability patterns *by the fire* or *by the hearth*:

- (1) *Like brownies, they prefer to work during daylight hours and snooze in a warm spot BY the hearth during the day, only hoping for a bowl of milk (...).*

In another combinability pattern Y is seen as designated to serve a certain function—cooking (*stove*), eating or writing (*table*)—like in the following:

- (2) *Chrissie was standing BY the stove, watching the kettle boil.*

By in the above case indicates that Chrissie is in the region of Y, which enables her to use Y functionally, but does not indicate directly that she uses it at the moment of speaking (differently from, for example, *Mamma is AT the stove*, i.e. cooking).

Other pieces of furniture do not exclude the usage of *by*, but again—the idea of a region, singled out in respect to Y and in which X is located, is put forward (e.g. *by the sofa*, *by the bed* of a sick person).

However, such pieces of furniture, like *cupboard* or *wardrobe*, do not seem to be sufficiently quality region-forming entities.

Utterances with *lake* or *sea* obviously preclude the quality of the region usually concerned with its climatic and/or cultural, emotional peculiarities, since location by the sea or lake is usually meant for recreation in general or for people seeking quietness or seclusion:

- (3) *At sixteen, he announces that he wants to spend his life in a (...)castle BY the sea.*

Since Y also serves as a quality region-forming element, it is obviously the leading element of spatial organisation, and thus X is seen as subordinate and less prominent element.

The component of close contact between X and Y, pointed out by some linguists (Lindkvist 1976; Dirven 1989), is an outcome of regional rather than non-regional space organisation, but might vary to some extent depending on the sizes of X and Y. In the majority of cases the distance is still fairly small, cf. negative evidence of the type:

- (4) **Landscape BY the house* (From Maljar & Seliverstova 1998)

BESIDE. As already discussed, *by* and *beside* refer to different types of spatial organisation—*by* is concerned with regional quality space organisation, whereas *beside* refers to non-regional localising description, location of X in respect to Y.

Beside refers to the positions of X and Y in relation to each other. Its core component is concerned with localising X in relation to a lateral side of Y of the type: *two boys sitting beside each other*. Moreover, the localisation involves both entities and they are of equal status; they are facing one and the same direction. So, differently from *by*, which is mainly concerned with the quality region singled out in relation to Y, *beside* focuses on a geometrical row-type structure, and positions taken by X and Y in it (the terms *positions* were borrowed from Maljar & Seliverstova 1998, 288).

One of the typical examples illustrating the row-type spatial organisation is driver and passenger, in which both of them face one and the same direction:

- (5) *The Captain tried to slide the back window down as unobtrusively as possible when the young sub-lieutenant sitting BESIDE the driver began to choke.*

Naturally, Lindkvist's term *laterality* is only applicable in the analysis of the preposition *beside*. Next, the positions of X and Y very often are taken by humans or animals. The idea of facing one direction is easily identifiable, since they have their natural fronts. In the case of artifacts, which are not excluded in the positions of X and/or Y, the concept of conventional or assumed fronts should be employed (Cf. intrinsic, canonical etc. orientation in Zelinsky-Wibbelt 1993, 8-9). In some cases, however, it is still difficult to identify the front, but then the idea of a complex consisting of several items is put forward. It does not contradict the idea of a row-type spatial organisation. In addition to humans and animals, the positions of X and Y could well be taken by a variety of entities, like humans beside windows, seas, forks and spoons beside plates, rocking horses beside windows etc. *The fork beside the plate* utterance type supports the positional interpretation of the meaning under study with X and Y, as two items equal in status, situated in a row and forming a complex. Indirectly, it can be proved by the following metaphorical extension of *beside*, which is based on its literal spatial meaning:

- (6) *If we accept integrity as a distinct political virtue BESIDE justice and fairness, then we have a general, nonstrategic argument for recognizing such rights.*

When the position of Y is taken by the entities of *sea, river or lake* type, the utterances compete with the preposition *by*; however, different conceptualisation of the same situation does not violate the principle of language economy and in each of the two cases brings forth different focus: in the

case of *by* the regional interpretation prevails, in the case of *beside*–non-regional, which offers no implications of a specific climatic, emotional, recreational region formed in relation to Y, e.g.:

- (7) *I'll just vanish and live alone in a cottage BESIDE the sea until I go quietly mad and drown myself.* (Cf. *by the sea* in (4))

Since in the selected meaning of *beside* X and Y are of equal status, their reversal is possible: *mother beside her child*–*child beside her mother*. However, the principles of physical dimensions (smaller object beside a bigger one) and function (driver–passenger) should not be violated. You can hardly place a house beside a rocking horse or a bowl beside a spoon etc.

Another fairly frequent utterance type–*by/beside the window*–does not exclude the usage of either of the two prepositions, rendering both types of spatial organisation:

- (8) *An old rocking horse BESIDE the window has given countless rides to the Pages' children and five grandchildren.* (Localisation)
(9) *As she made the tea, he stood BY the window gazing across the garden, conscious of her resentment.* (Region, in which X is able to use Y according to function)

Distance in *beside* is determined by the semantic component of position/localisation. Like in *by*, it is fairly short and very much context-specific. The short distance can still be shortened by the intensifiers like *just* and *immediately*.

To sum up the description of the English data, it should be noted that the leading element in the semantics of *by* is a region formed in relation to Y which exerts warmth, light or can be used according to its function, *beside* presupposes a row-type organisation in which X and Y face the same direction. In *by* Y is the Relatum, the quality forming centre, X is subordinate, influenced by Y. In *beside* X and Y are of equal status, often of the same type and occupying certain positions etc. The component of distance for any of the two prepositions is irrelevant and highly dependent on the type of spatial organisation.

ŠALIA. GRETA. TIES. If we adopt the distinction *region* vs. *non-region* as metalinguistic concepts applicable to the semantics of Lithuanian prepositions of proximity, *region* is relevant in the analysis of just one of the meanings of *ties*. However, it refers to a geometrical rather than quality region of spatial organisation. The other two Lithuanian prepositions under study refer to the non-regional, localising description of space. They focus on different aspects of localisation: *šalia* refers to a sequence of entities in space, *greta* specifies the positions of X and Y in a row-type of sequence, both facing the same direction.

ŠALIA. *Šalia* is concerned with spatial organisation best described as a sequence of entities in space. The sides or laterality seems to be irrelevant and contributed by the context, e.g.:

- (10) *...lenktinis peiliukas guli ŠALIA tabakinės.*
'The clasp-knife lies beside the tobacco box.'

Since *šalia* renders the general meaning of proximity, X and Y are seen as rather unrelated entities, possibly with their own sub-spaces. Their positions are taken by a variety of objects ranging from humans to animals to artifacts and from one-dimensional to two-dimensional to three-dimensional objects. Still the leading role in the spatial organisation of events is reserved to Y. The verbs used in collocations with *šalia* Y usually refer to location–describing parking, living and similar events, e.g.:

- (11) *Gyvenantiems ŠALIA aerodromų žmonėms mokamos kompensacijos (...).*
'Those who lived close to airports were paid compensations (...).'

In many cases what happens within an entity (Y) and what is outside it is contrasted. The contrast is well preserved in the metaphorical meaning of the type:

- (12) *ŠALIA Šv.Pauliaus Seneka buvo žymiausia epochos siela.*
'Beside St. Paul, Seneca is the most prominent soul of his epoch.'

One of bilingual Lithuanian English dictionaries gives *by* as a translation equivalent for *šalia*, which is hardly appropriate because of differing types of spatial organisation underlying them. The irrelevance of quality region in *šalia* is attested by the negative evidence of the type:

- (13) *?Ji norėtų gyventi ŠALIA jūros, ežero.* (My example – I.Š.)
'She would like to live by/beside the sea/lake.'
(14) **Ji stovėjo ŠALIA plytos ir gamino pietus.* (My example – I.Š.)
'She was standing beside the stove and making lunch.'

Hence, *šalia* would only be possible in the above two sentences, if the focus were on non-regional geometry, on the location of objects.

The component of distance in the preposition *šalia* is not specified and strongly depends on the situation. However, long distances are excluded, whereas the existing distance can be shortened by the intensifiers of the type: *čia pat, visai*.

GRETA. The Lithuanian *greta* is semantically closest to the English *beside*. It presupposes a row-type organisation of entities, and they should be facing one and the same direction. This type of spatial relation is typically realised in the driver and passenger situation e.g.:

- (15) *Paaiškėjo, kad automobilį vairavo (...) Vytautas (...), GRETA jo sėdėjo jo draugė.*
'It turned out that Vytautas was driving with his girl-friend sitting beside him.'

Humans in the positions of X and Y seem to be fairly frequent. *Šalia* also presupposes an equal status of both participants, hence the productivity of utterances with reciprocals of *one another* or *each other* type, e.g.:

- (16) *Vos jie susėdė GRETA vienas kito, jis uždėjo merginai ranką ant juosmens (...)*
'They sat beside each other and he instantly put his hand round the girl's waist.'

Another productive utterance type in Lithuanian is concerned with being laid down into a grave beside someone, e.g.:

- (17) *Bronislava GRETA vyro atgulė prieš pusantrų metų.*
'Bronislava laid beside her husband a year and a half ago.'

This type of utterance realises two components of the meaning of *greta*: row-type organisation and close relation—physical as well as emotional. They are both preserved in the metaphor, where the relationship is transferred from physical into emotional domain.

Distance in the semantics of *greta* is predetermined by the row-type organisation and immediate sequence of entities. The combinability of *greta* with intensifiers of *visai, visiškai* type is not excluded. The short distance in many cases gives rise to metaphorical extensions.

TIES. *Ties* presupposes a type of spatial organisation concerned with a geometrical region, in which Y functions as a starting or intermediate point in the activities/journey of the agent. Hence it is typically expressed by location-type entities which lend themselves to a point conceptualisation in a sequence of other same type points of the whole situation, e.g.

- (18) *Smarkūs mūšiai vyko TIES Šiauliais.*
'There were furious battles going on at Šiauliai.'

Šiauliai, a town in Lithuania, is taken as one of the prominent points where battles were developing; it was selected in the region/search domain. So, even if the battles were breaking at some village not far from Šiauliai, the village would not be considered sufficiently important in the whole description of battles.

Naturally, the position of Y is often taken by place-names—cities, towns, villages and other localisation entities like cinemas, supermarkets, petrol stations, a confluence of rivers, crossroads, bridges, by-passes, also a middle of the road, a corner of the street etc. Humans in the position of Y are comparatively rare. The preposition *ties* is often used in historical or geographical descriptions, finding-a-way type instructions. The entity in Y lends itself to its conceptualisation as a point in actual or potential (called freeze-frame phenomenon in Talmy 1983, 256) journey of the agent of the situation. Hence, the most frequent verbs occurring with *ties* are *stabelti*, *atsidurti*, *pasukti*, etc. ('stop, find oneself, turn') E.g.:

(19) *Dar norėčiau trumpai stabelėti TIES Georgo Brandeso politinėmis pažiūromis.*

'I would like to stop at George Brandes's political views.'

Example (19) is an obvious spatial metaphor, in which the speaker proceeds from one issue to another, reduces speed or stops at more important issues etc.

Like in *šalia* and *greta*, the distance between X and Y in *ties* is very short. It can be made shorter when using the intensifiers *visai* or (*ties*) *pat*, *pačiu*, *pačia*.

The 'geographical' localisation pattern, as described above, does not exclude other types of Y (see example (21)). There is an interesting, though fairly frequent, conceptualisation posited in the following sentence:

(20) *Jis ėmė žilti TIES smilkiniais.*

'His hair started graying at the temples.'

The process of graying started at the temples and is likely to continue.

Another frequent combinability pattern with *ties* refers to the ultimate situations and thus in Y has nouns like *slenkstis*, *skardis*, *riba*, also *bedugnė*, *praraja* ('threshold, precipice, verge/brink; bathos, abyss'), which usually have an implication that one is very close to some dangerous, inevitable, important decision-making point, e.g.:

(21) *Jo verslas tą pačią minutę atsidurs TIES bankroto riba.*

'At the same moment his business will be on the verge of bankruptcy.'

Thus, the three Lithuanian prepositions of proximity help render several types of spatial relations: sequence of entities in space in *šalia*, row-type organisation with X and Y facing the same direction in *greta* and geometrical region with X localised at the starting/intermediate point Y on actual or potential journey of the agent in *ties*.

Conclusions

1. The analysis of a group of prepositions usually described as prepositions of proximity, has manifested at least two types of proximity: regional and non-regional. Non-regional proximity is concerned with localising one entity in relation to another in space, whereas regional proximity also presupposes a qualitative or geometrical sub-space (region) singled out in relation to one of the entities.

2. Regional interpretation seems to be relevant for the English *by* and the Lithuanian *ties*. The character of the region in *by* is concerned with the pragmatic function of Y or its qualities. In *ties* it is concerned with geometrical region or search domain.

3. Non-regional proximity manifests several varieties—in one of them the preposition refers to a sequence of entities in space (*šalia*), in another—to a row-type spatial organisation (*beside* and *greta*).

4. Mutual interchangeability in some contexts (e.g. *by the sea* vs *beside the sea*; *greta vairuotojo* vs *šalia vairuotojo*) is caused by a possibility to choose between two interpretations—either regional or non-regional.

5. Some metaphorical extensions very briefly discussed in the context of space conceptualisation of physical proximity are based on physical space relations.

6. Further studies in the area should be focusing on other prepositions of proximity, other means of expressing proximity and/or the analysis of their metaphorical extensions.

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ARTUMO SANTYKIŲ RAIŠKA ANGLŲ IR LIETUVIŲ KALBOSE

Inesa Šeškauskienė

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama kai kurių artumo prielinksnių semantika anglų ir lietuvių kalbose: angliškujų *by*, *beside* ir lietuviškųjų *šalia*, *greta*, *ties*. Nustatyta, kad bendriausios sąvokos 'artumas' (angl. *proximity*) šių sinonimiškų prielinksnių reikšmei atskleisti nepakanka. Tyrime remtasi angliškuoju nacionaliniu britų ir lietuviškuoju Donelaičio tekstyne; tyrimas grindžiamas komponentine analize, kognityvinės lingvistikos principais bei lingvistiniu eksperimentu.

Nagrinėjamos grupės prielinksniai pagal reikšmę skirstytini į du erdvės santykių organizavimo tipus: regioninį ir neregioninį. Regioninis tipas dar suskyla į du regiono variantus: kokybinės erdvės, kuri realizuojama angliškuoju *by* (*A castle by the sea*) ir geometrinės erdvės, kuris realizuojamas lietuviškuoju *ties* (*Mūšiai vyko ties Šiauliais*). Neregioninio tipo santykiai realizuojami arba kaip objektų seka erdvėje (lietuviškuoju prielinksniu *šalia* – *šalia kelio karčema*), arba kaip eilės tipo objektų sąranga erdvėje, kai du ar daugiau objektų veidu/fasadine puse yra atsigręžę į vieną pusę. Pastarojo pobūdžio erdvės santykiai realizuojami angliškuoju prielinksniu *beside* (*He was sitting beside the driver*) ir lietuviškuoju *greta* (*atgulė greta savo vyro*).

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