

From adverb to approximator: *Practically* in Late Modern English

Research Article

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Abstract: The degree modifier *practically*, meaning ‘almost, nearly’ and functioning as a “approximator downtoner” (Quirk et al. 1985) or “approximator” in the “totality modifier class” (Paradis 2008), arises in Late Modern English, developing from an adverb of manner or respect meaning ‘in a practical manner, in practice, in reality’ in Early Modern English. This paper explores the historical development of *practically*. Modifying predicative and appositive adjectives and prepositional and adverbial phrases and occurring in noun and determiner phrases, *practically* comes to serve as a degree adverb. Modifying verbs and participles, it comes to function as a degree adjunct, often with negative implicature and emphaser rather than degree function.

Corpus findings point to the appearance of approximator uses of *practically* in all syntactic contexts in a confined period from 1830–1863 (cf. Núñez-Pertejo 2023). In ambiguous or “bridging” contexts, the manner meaning ‘in practice, in effect’ can be reinterpreted as ‘most often the case’ and hence as falling short of the expected level, thus giving rise to the approximator meaning ‘almost, nearly’. The change from a lexical adverb to a degree modifier is a process of grammaticalization, involving decategorialization (functional shift), host-class expansion, syntactic context expansion, desemanticization, semantic-pragmatic change, and subjectification. The later appearance of the degree modifier *practically* with bare verbs argues for a trajectory from degree adverb to degree adjunct rather than the reverse. With lexical adjectives, the approximator is grammaticalized first in predicative position and only later in attributive position, most likely because the predicative position is most similar to the “locus for reanalysis”, namely *be/have* + past participle (De Smet 2012). Finally, the negative implicature of the degree adjunct *practically* most likely develops because of the preponderance of verbs with negative semantic prosody, where ‘almost P’ is reinterpreted as ‘not (quite) P’, motivated by subjectification (Ziegeler 2015; 2016).

Keywords: *practically* • degree adverb • degree adjunct • approximator • grammaticalization • Late Modern English

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1 Introduction

The degree modifier use of *practically* meaning ‘almost, virtually’ arises in Late Modern English. The first citation in the *Oxford English dictionary* (OED; s.v. *practically*, adv.) dates from the mid-18th century (1a), and this seems to be confirmed by corpus evidence, as in (1b):

- (1) a. The true Root, or such an Approximation as is **practically** equivalent (1749 D. Hartley, *Observ. Man* I.iii.349; OED)
- b. The latter seems to have been a woman of character, and to have **practically** governed the island (1768–71 Captain Cook’s *Journals*; *The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts, Version 3.1* [CLMET3.1])

The OED lists the degree meaning as the second meaning (‘almost, in effect, virtually’, def. 2), apparently derived from the manner adverb, which is given as the first, historically prior meaning (‘in a practical manner, in practice’, def. 1):

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- (2) The attourneys academy; or, the manner and forme of proceeding **practically**, vpon any suite, plaint, or action whatsoever ... (1623 T. Powell (title); OED)

In contrast, contemporary dictionaries give the degree sense as the first (i.e., most common) meaning (see, e.g., *The American heritage dictionary*, s.v. *practically*) suggesting that the degree adverb has now surpassed, though not replaced, the manner adverb, which still continues to exist (3):

- (3) a. We're just trying to approach things **practically**. (2015 *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* [COCA]: FIC)
 b. Theoretically and **practically**, this project provided a replicable program (1991 COCA: ACAD)

As a manner adverb, *practically* is a process adjunct and “can be paraphrased *in a ... manner* or *in a ... way* with its adjective base in the vacant position” (Quirk et al. 1985: 557). It can usually answer the question *How?* (Quirk et al. 1985: 558) (see example (3a)). It can also function as a sentence adjunct of respect, which can often appear in sentence-initial or -final position (Quirk et al. 1985: 483, 511). Here it does not mean ‘in a practical manner’ but rather ‘in respect to practice’.¹

The degree modifier *practically*, is classified as an “approximator downtoner” (Quirk et al. 1985: 597): downtoners have “a generally lowering effect on the force” of the modified expression, with approximators denoting “an approximation to the force” of the expression. Paradis (2008: 321) calls *practically* an “approximator” in the “totality modifier class”, which includes maximizers (e.g., *absolutely*, *completely*) as well as approximators (e.g., *almost*, *nearly*, *virtually*). Totality modifiers are associated with a definite boundary; approximators “indicate that a gradable property falls short of that maximum or that BOUNDARY” (ibid.). Degree modifiers occur with gradable adjectives and must be harmonious with the adjectives that they modify; that is, bounded modifiers can only modify bounded adjectives, of which there are two types (Paradis 2001: 54; 2008: 323). As a totality modifier, then, it would only be possible for *practically* to modify (1) complementarity (nonscalar) adjectives such as *dead*, *sober*, *certain*, *clear*, or (2) contrariety/antonymy (bounded scalar) adjectives such as *excellent*, *terrible*, *brilliant*, *disastrous*, *terrific*, *disgusting*. In the latter case, boundedness may be more “subjective-evaluative” (Paradis 2001: 324). It is normally not possible for *practically* to modify contrariety/antonymy (unbounded scalar) adjectives such as *narrow*, *long*, *good*, *nasty*.

While the history of degree modifiers in English is receiving increasing attention in the literature,² the focus has been primarily on those forms that scale upwards (maximizers and boosters), rather than on those that scale downwards (approximators, moderators, diminishers). Apart from Claridge, Jonsson & Kytö (2024: Chapter 7), which examines downtoners³ in the Old Bailey Corpus, only a few diachronic studies of individual English downtoners exist (see Akimoto 2001 on *far from*; Nevalainen & Rissanen 2001 on *fairly*; Rissanen 2008 on *rather*; De Smet 2012 on *far from*; Claridge & Kytö 2014a; 2014b on *a bit* and *pretty*; Brinton & Inoue 2020 on *far from*; Brinton 2021 on *nigh(ly)*, *near*, and *next (to)*). To complement these studies – and attempt to answer some of the questions raised by them – this paper undertakes an historical study of the approximator *practically*, which has to date received only limited attention (see Núñez-Pertejo 2023).

The paper begins (Section 2) with a discussion of the functions of *practically* as an approximator in Present-day English. It then turns to the historical study, beginning with a general discussion of the development of degree modifiers, including their sources, semantic changes undergone, and grammaticalization pathways followed (Section 3). Section 4 provides a corpus-based historical account of *practically*, both as a manner/respect adverb and as an approximator. Section 5 discusses

1 The OED (s.v. *practically*, adv., def. 1) does not separate these two uses, stating in the same definition that *practically* can mean either ‘in a practical manner; in practice’ or ‘in reality (frequently opposed to *theoretically*, *speculatively*, or *formally*)’.

2 For monograph-length treatments, see Claridge, Jonsson & Kytö (2024) on degree adverbs in Late Modern English, also Stratton (forthcoming) on degree adverbs in Middle English.

3 Note that much of the literature follows Quirk et al.’s classification and uses the term “downtoner”, though terminology is inconsistent. Núñez-Pertejo (2023: 65), for example, notes that *practically* belongs to Quirk et al.’s (1985) approximating sub-group of downtoners, but then throughout calls it an “intensifier”.

the characteristics of grammaticalization evidenced by *practically*, considers the possible trajectory of grammaticalization followed, proposes reasons for the approximator's appearance in predicative position and only later in attributive position, and finally hypothesizes how the negative implicature of the degree adjunct arises. Section 6 concludes the paper.

The questions addressed by the paper include:

- R1: When and in which contexts do the first uses of *practically* as a degree modifier appear?
- R2: How does the source of *practically* compare with the recognized sources of degree modifiers?
- R3: Can we trace the semantic development of *practically* from a manner/respect adverb to its degree function?
- R4: Is it possible to establish a grammaticalization pathway for the different degree uses of *practically*?

2 Degree uses of *practically* in Present-day English

Practically has a number of different degree modifier uses. In (4a) it functions as a **degree adverb** modifying either a predicative or attributive adjective (ADJ). In (4b) it modifies an adverb (ADV) or prepositional phrase (PP). As noted by Huddleston & Pullum et al. (2002: 430–431, 437), *practically* may also serve as a degree adverb in the noun phrase (NP) modifying the entire phrase or in the determiner phrase (DP) modifying the immediately following word (4c). As a modifier of the NP, it occurs frequently with *the same/only/entire/whole* N, with *the* N, or with a pronoun (PRO) such as *none/nothing/alone/all*. As a modifier of the DP, it occurs frequently with *all/every/no/half (the)* N. (The element modified by *practically* is underlined.)

- (4) a. degree adverb, modifier of predicative ADJ (i) or attributive ADJ (ii)
 (i) The pipeline is **practically** dry. (2017 COCA: MAG)⁴
 (ii) there is a **practically** unanimous opinion (1996 COCA: ACAD)
- b. degree adverb, modifier of ADV (i) or PP (ii)
 (i) his ups and downs have been chronicled **practically** daily in the media: (2011 COCA: NEWS)
 (ii) I came back and found it **practically** in ruins. (2015 COCA: FIC)
- c. degree adverb, modifier in the NP (i) or in the DP (ii)
 (i) and this woman, this friend of mine, was on her cell phone the whole, [**practically** the whole dinner]. (2016 COCA: SPOK)
 That's [**practically** the definition] of American culture. (2008 COCA: MAG)
 and there is [**practically** nothing] that the US can do about it at this point (2017 COCA: MAG)
 (ii) [**practically** all] students have their own smartphones, (2013 COCA: ACAD)
 Season 6 ended with a plane carrying [**practically** half] the cast possibly crashing. (2012 COCA: BLOG)

A final use, which Huddleston & Pullum et al. (2002: 583–584, 723) describe as a **degree adjunct**, is exemplified in (5); here *practically* modifies a verb (V) or verbal:

- (5) degree adjunct, modifier of V (including present and past participles)
 Brad **practically** lived here when he was in New Orleans. (2015 COCA: TV)
 I was **practically** engaged by then. (2019 COCA: FIC)
 He was **practically** begging everyone on the board to help him (2012 COCA: BLOG)

Degree adjuncts imply “a denial of the truth value of what is denoted” (Quirk et al. 1985: 599) or trigger “a strong negative implicature” (Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 723). Ziegeler (2015: 1) notes that “the semantics of *almost* and similar devices ... refer to an implicit negation which is present as

4 Examples in this section are, for convenience, provided from COCA, though this is not to suggest that these uses are exclusive to American English. All may be found in British English, as well; it is not the purpose of this paper to examine the diatopic distribution of these forms.

highly conventionalized or even, according to some accounts, an entailed meaning of such function”.⁵ Consider, for instance, the examples in (6):

- (6) a. The store didn’t carry my size ... and they **practically** threw us out. They were very, very rude. (2009 COCA: TV)
 b. I **practically** screamed at Marie this morning over a misshelved magazine. (1995 COCA: FIC)

In (6a), the speaker was not thrown out of the store; in (6b), the speaker didn’t scream at Marie, but in both cases these actions could have happened or came close to happening; both are hyperbolic. Note that in this use, *practically* is not so much an approximator as a (negative) emphaser. As a degree adjunct, *practically* may occur in medial position in the verb phrase following a modal or auxiliary (*I could practically see you blushing* [2016 COCA: FIC]), but is rare in the position preceding the verb phrase, unless the clause is negative (*He practically didn’t budge the whole time* [2007 COCA: FIC]) (Quirk et al. 1985: 601–602).

From as early as 1909 the degree adjunct use of *practically* has been considered a misuse, though as *Webster’s dictionary of English usage* points out (1989: 755–756) reasons for the proscriptions are often vague.⁶

3 The origin of degree modifiers

In this section, I review what the literature suggests generally concerning the semantic development and grammaticalization pathways of degree modifiers before turning to the specific history of *practically* in the following sections.

3.1 Sources and semantic change

Adverbs of manner are a common source for degree modifiers. A number of degree modifiers where manner meanings have been shown to be the source include *fairly*, originally meaning ‘in a fair manner, pretty’ (Nevalainen & Rissanen 2001), Old English *swīpe*, originally meaning ‘strongly, powerfully, violently’ (Méndez-Naya 2003), *downright*, originally meaning ‘straight down, vertically’ (Méndez-Naya 2008a), and *rather*, originally meaning ‘quickly, immediately’ (Rissanen 2008). Núñez-Pertejo (2023: 77–78) has shown this to be the case with *practically* as well.

For Peters (1994: 269–270), whose focus is on maximizers and boosters, degree meanings arise by a kind of “scale transfer”, which is a special kind of metaphorical change from position on a quantitative scale to position on another kind of scale, namely, a scale of intensification. Paradis (2001: 59; 2008: 324), in contrast, sees the rise of degree meaning as a case of “metonymization” of boundedness or scale (the schematic domain) at the expense of lexical meaning (the content domain); degree becomes foregrounded and construed as the most salient component of meaning, thus leading to the rise of function words. In general, the rise of degree meanings shows a shift from non-subjective meanings (e.g., expressions of dimension, location, quantity, manner) to subjective meanings involving speakers’ “assessment and evaluation of intensity, position on a scale, ordering of alternatives, etc.” (Traugott 2006: 343). Athanasiadou (2007) sees a two-step progression:

- Step one is the change from quantification to intensification (degree adverb): e.g., *absolutely brilliant singer* > *took absolutely everything*;
- Step two is the change from intensification to emphasis (degree adjunct): e.g., *took absolutely everything* > *absolutely understood one another*.

⁵ On whether counterfactualty is an entailment or a conversational/conventional implicature, see Ziegeler (2010).

⁶ In this use, Fowler (1965: 469) sees *practically* as having “escaped from its true meaning into something like the opposite”. He is thus critical of the degree adjunct use: “While it is a ‘short step’ to the meaning ‘almost’, this can lead to ‘absurdities’ such as *The horse practically won* – ‘which is exactly what it did not do’”.

Thus, in her view, degree adjuncts are emphasers; they do not express degree but denote either a high (or low) degree of speaker certainty/commitment, reinforcing (or undercutting) truth value (2007: 561). They are maximally subjective and arise later than degree modifiers.

3.2 Grammaticalization pathways

The development of degree modifiers is seen as a prototypical case of grammaticalization involving a functional shift from a full lexical form to a grammatical modifier (e.g., Traugott 2008). According to Lorenz, “The most prominent adjective intensifier, *very*, is arguably also the most prominent case of grammaticalization” (2002: 145). Likewise, Breban & Davidse interpret *very* as “a paradigm case of progressive grammaticalization” (2016: 221). The evolution of the Old English degree adverb *swiþe* ‘very’ involves grammaticalization, including the acquisition of abstract, general meanings, the increase in frequency and widening of contexts of occurrence, reduction in scope, its loss of mobility, decategorialization, and the layering of older and newer forms (Méndez-Naya 2003: 374–378). Tracing the development of the degree modifiers *a sort of*, *a lot of*, and *a shred of*, Traugott (2008: 234) points to the following changes as characteristic of grammaticalization: movement from a free to a constrained position, change from concrete to abstract meaning, rebracketing and reversal of headship, host class expansion (from modifying concrete to abstract heads), syntactic expansion from pre-ADJ to pre-V to free adjunct, semantic-pragmatic expansion, i.e., the acquisition of degree meaning, and layering and renewal of already extant categories.⁷

Among studies of degree adverbs two different grammaticalization trajectories have been postulated:

1. Spatial/manner adverb > degree adjunct (with verbs) > degree adverb (with adjectives/adverbs)
2. Spatial/manner adverb > degree adverb (with adjective/adverbs) > degree adjunct (with verbs) > free adjunct

Méndez-Naya (2008b: 215) speaks of the first path as a “well-known” trajectory. Citing the development of *downright*, she sees it evolving from a spatial adverb meaning ‘straight down’ to a degree adjunct meaning ‘out-and-out, absolutely’ modifying verbs to a modifier of scalar adjectives/adverbs meaning ‘completely, extremely’ serving as a “maximizer” (*downright rude*) (Méndez-Naya 2008a). Similarly, Nevalainen & Rissanen (2001) understand the development of *fairly* as proceeding from a source adjective to a manner adverb (e.g., *fairly inscribed on a label*) to a “subjunct” (degree adjunct, or emphaser/amplifier) (e.g., *we will fairly make ’em this offer*) to a degree adverb (e.g., *they were all fairly well*).

In contrast, a number of studies have argued for the second pathway. Traugott (2008) traces an initial change in *a sort of*, *a lot of*, and *a shred of* from a pre-partitive to partitive sense (e.g., *a sort of a gentleman*). This develops into a degree adverb (e.g., *sort of bewildered*), which is later followed by a degree adjunct (e.g., *sort o’ stirs*). A free adjunct represents the final step in the development (e.g., *Yes, sort of*). In a study of *far from*, Brinton & Inoue (2020) understand the source of the degree modifier to be a spatial adjective *far* complemented by a prepositional phrase (e.g., *fer from smoky place/far from writing*). Then *far from* is reanalyzed as the adverbial modifier of the adjective head (*fer from full, far from barbarous*), that is, as a degree adverb. The use of *far from* as modifier of a verb (*far from deserves*) with negative emphasizing meaning, that is, as a degree adjunct, is a later development, as is the free adjunct or pragmatic marker *far from it*. Focusing on relatives of the approximator *nearly*, Brinton (2021) sees *nigh(ly)*, *near*, and *next to* all originating as proximal locative adverbs. *Nigh* is already established in Middle English as an approximator; the degree adverb (e.g., *negh ded* ‘nearly dead’) is more frequent and hence earlier than the degree adjunct use (e.g., *nigh lost it*); a free adjunct use is also found (e.g., *Nygh he fel in repentaunce*). *Near* is also established early as an approximator, with the degree adverb (e.g., *nerre wode* ‘nearly mad’) preceding the degree adjunct (e.g., *nerre bristez* ‘nearly bursts’). Both *nigh* and *near* are still found in restricted (typically negative) contexts, but have been generally replaced by *nearly*. *Next to* develops only the degree adverb use (e.g., *next to useless, next to nothing*) with a few examples of the degree adjunct use (e.g., *next to adore*); this is a case of incipient grammaticalization.

⁷ On grammaticalization of degree adverbs, see also Claridge, Jonsson & Kytö (2024: 29–34).

4 The historical development of *practically*

This section provides a careful dating of the different uses of *practically*, including the appearance of *practically* in the various syntactic contexts (as illustrated in examples 4–5) and its first uses as a degree modifier.

4.1 Historical corpora and methodology

To provide the best possible historical coverage, a variety of historical corpora and text collections were used for this study, covering the Early and Late Modern English periods, as set out in Table 1. Because the sources differ in type and size (some are multi-genre, such as CLMET3.1, COHA, ARCHER, and CEAL, others are single genre, such as OB, and others are text collections, such as EEBO), quantitative analysis is not generally possible, and the following study will be primarily qualitative in nature.

Table 1. Historical corpora used.

Corpus	Dates	Size
British		
EEBO = Early English Books Online	1470s–1690s	755,000,000 words
OB = Old Bailey Proceedings	1674–1913	127,000,000 words
CLMET3.1 = The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts, Version 3.1	1710–1920	34,386,224 words
British and American		
ARCHER = A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers	1600–1999	c. 3,300,000 words
American		
CEAL = Corpus of Early American Literature	1690–1920	13,544,297 words
COHA = The Corpus of Historical American English	1820–2009	475,000,000 words

In EEBO, 1150 examples of *practically/practicallie* were found. These were analyzed using part-of-speech tagging to find *practically* in the different syntactic contexts and searched for possible degree readings. In the Late Modern English corpora:

- All examples from the first and second periods of CLMET3.1 (1710–1780, 1780–1850) (11 and 120 examples, respectively) and a random sample of 200 tokens from the third period (1850–1920) were analyzed (total: 331 tokens out of 568 tokens retrieved).
- All examples from CEAL were analyzed (total: 213 tokens).
- All examples from ARCHER pre-1920 were analyzed (total: 19 tokens).
- A random sample of 200 examples from OB for the period 1840–1900 were analyzed, with 22 earlier examples all judged to be manner/respect adverbs (total: 200 tokens out of 1154 tokens retrieved).

A search of COHA data, restricted to the period 1820–1869, based on the assumed date of the first degree modifier uses found in the other sources, yielded 991 tokens. Because COHA is part-of-speech tagged it was possible to examine the syntactic context of *practically* (e.g., position before V, before ADV, before P, before DET, etc.) to find the earliest degree modifier uses in each context.

4.2 *Practically* as an adverb of manner or respect

The first example of *practically* in the OED (s.v. *practically*, adv., def. 1) dates from 1571 (see (7a)); EEBO supplies one further 16th century example (7b). *Practically* rises in frequency in the mid-17th century. In the early examples, it is contrasted with “theoretically” or other adverbs (“mathimatically”, “doctrinally”, etc.) and serves as an adverb of respect (7a–b). Clear manner uses (i.e., paraphrasable as ‘in a practical manner’) also appear early, but are less frequent (7c–d):

- (7) a. hitherto haue i onely intreated of the fiue regulare bodies, theoretically and **practically** opening sundrie meanes to search out the proportion and quantities of their sides, (1571 Digges & Digges, *A geometrical practice*; EEBO)
 b. wherein i haue handled the whole varietie of that subiect, bothe **practically**, and mathimatically, (1581 Norman, *The newe attractiue*; EEBO)
 c. your doctrine is my doctrine, your faith, my faith, your opinion mine opinion: I **practically** shew it in building this altar before the Calfe, (1609 Bell, *A Christian dialogue*; EEBO)
 d. as he is a wise-man: for he doth many things, which we see as well to be done, euen by those that are most vnwise, but either more skilfully or more **practically**: (1614 Seneca [trans. Lodge et al.]; EEBO)

As would be expected of an adverb, *practically* is most frequent and earliest in contexts modifying a verb or verbal (past participle, present participle) (336 examples in EEBO).⁸ It also occurs in a not insubstantial number of cases (90 examples in EEBO) as a modifier of an adjective in predicative position beginning in the mid-17th century, see (8a). In appositive position, *practically* is very rare (only two examples are found in EEBO), see (8b):

- (8) a. this knowledge though speculatively true, is **practically false**; (1645 Maynard, *A sermon preached to the honorable House of Commons*; EEBO)
 b. whether the character of a **practically religious** man, and at the same time a very great philosopher, suits any man (1698 Turner, *A physico-theological discourse upon the Divine Being*; EEBO)

As a modifier in the NP or in the DP, examples are limited and extremely rare; there are two examples of *practically the same* (N) as in (9a), and two examples of *practically no* N as in (9b) in EEBO:

- (9) a. an opinion that is speculatively probable is not always **practically the same**: (1660 Taylor, *Ductor dubitantium*; EEBO)
 b. it is **practically no** power at all against one in possession, (1677 Stillingfleet, *The Jesuits loyalty ...*; EEBO)

Practically does not occur as modifier of a PP or an ADV, though it can modify another degree adverb as in (10):

- (10) a. gods image and interest in his servants, and in mankind, must be **practically more** precious to us, and more beloved by us, than all our carnal sinful pleasures: (1670 Baxter, *The life of faith in three parts ...*; EEBO)
 b. but the very eighth and tenth moral Commandements of god himself, now **practically quite** expunged out of their decalogue? (1656 Prynne, *A summary collection of the principal fundamental rights ...*; EEBO)

In many of the Early Modern English examples it is difficult to determine whether *practically* functions as a manner/respect adverb, or whether it might receive a degree reading of ‘virtually, almost’. A close examination of the 92 examples in EEBO where *practically* modifies an ADJ shows that it typically occurs with a unbounded adjective (compatible with *very*) where a totality modifier such as *practically* would be incompatible (*averse, criminal, destructive, difficult, highest, honest, ignorant, imitable, impious, improbable, inconsistent, mindful, mysterious, obedient, pagan, practical, presbyterial, probable, prodigious, profound, pure, religious, salutiferous, (self-)evident, skilful, skill'd, spiritual, thankfull, true, unerring, useful, vitious, wicked, wrong*). Only in a few instances is the adjective compatible with *almost* (*applicable, certain, convinced, distinct, false, good, indifferent, wise, worthy, wrong*) and even in these cases where the adjective is bounded, the larger context reveals that the interpretation must be as a manner/respect adverb, as in the examples in (11):

8 *Practically* is found in other positions common for process and sentence adverbs, such as post-verbally (273 examples) or sentence finally (254 examples). Sentence-initial position is rare (and late).

- (11) a. or it is remarkable, that a probable conscience though it be in speculation uncertain, yet it may be **practically certain**. (1660 Taylor, *Ductor dubitantium*; EEBO)
 b. in which there is not only an admirable skill and strength of mind requisite, but also an holy habit: no precepts can suddenly make a man **practically wise, or good**; (1694 Allestree, *The government of the thoughts*; EEBO)

In sum, it would appear that *practically* functions exclusively as a manner/respect adverb in Early Modern English, most often modifying a verb or participle, or an adjective in predicative position. The occurrence of *practically* in other positions – as modifier in the NP or DP or of an ADV or PP or of an ADJ in attributive position – is either extremely rare or non-existent.

4.3 *Practically* as an approximator

The development of the approximator function involves a semantic change from the meaning ‘in practice, actually, in reality’ to the meaning ‘almost’. As noted by Núñez-Pertejo (2023: 69), it is often difficult to distinguish these two meanings.⁹ There are many ambiguous examples, as in (12):¹⁰

- (12) a. The latter seems to have been a woman of much character, and to have **practically governed** the island. (1768–71 Captain Cook’s *Journals*; CLMET3.1) (given before as 1b)
 b. These measures were **practically ignored**. (1775 Burke, *On conciliation with America*; CLMET3.1)
 c. I shall (I do really think) render him more celebrated than ever, by **practically illustrating** every precept in every period! (1776 Pratt, *The pupil of pleasure*; CLMET3.1)

The examples in (12) all allow the meaning ‘in practice’ or the meaning ‘almost’. That is, did the woman ‘in practice’ govern the island or did she ‘almost’ govern the island (12a), were the measures ‘in practice’ ignored or were they almost entirely ignored (12b), and shall I ‘in practice’ illustrate the precepts or shall I illustrate most (but not every) precept (12c)?

Even the example cited in the OED as the earliest example of the degree meaning strikes me as ambiguous (see (1a)).

Examples such as those cited in (12) can serve as “bridging contexts” in which the meaning ‘in practice, in effect’ can be reinterpreted as ‘most often the case, for all intents and purposes’ and hence as ‘falling short of the expected level’, thus giving rise to the approximator meaning ‘almost, nearly’.

4.3.1 *First approximator occurrences*

In my corpora, all of the approximator uses arise in rapid succession roughly in middle of the 19th century (1830–1863) (see examples (13–22), (A1–A10), summarized in Table 2).

Below I provide the first example of a clear approximator use that I found in my corpora. Further examples, showing the range of syntactic contexts, are provided in the Appendix, examples (A1–A10). As discussed in Section 2, when *practically* modifies a verb or verbal (past or present participle), it functions as a degree adjunct; in all other cases it functions as a degree adverb.

- (13) It was also what made that voice of civilization to whose harmony I have alluded **practically the same thing** as the voice of literature. (1830 *North American Review*; COHA)
 (14) Thus far, each settlement had chosen its own military leader, and discipline was **practically unknown** (1831 Withers, *Chronicles of border warfare*; CEAL)

9 Nonetheless, Núñez-Pertejo is able to analyze all of the 193 examples of *practically* she finds in the Old Bailey Corpus and all but 6 of the 567 examples she finds in CLMET3.0 as either adverbs of manner or what she calls “intensifiers” (2023: 69–70). My own experience with the data would suggest that such clear-cut distinctions would be very difficult to make.

Note that Núñez-Pertejo uses a previous corpus version (CLMET3.0) to the one used here (CLMET3.1), but the number of examples of *practically* found in the two corpora does not differ. (I found 568 examples in both; she found 567 in CLMET3.0.) Núñez-Pertejo uses the *Old Bailey Corpus 2.0, 1720–1913*, a selection from the complete OB proceedings.

10 Núñez-Pertejo (2023: 73) finds 11 examples of *practically* in the first period of CLMET3.0 (1710–1780), four of which she analyzes as intensifiers. Unfortunately, she does not identify which examples she considers approximators, though one modifies a Noun/NP, one a Pronoun, and two Verbs/VP. Most likely, they include the examples cited in (11), all of which I find ambiguous. She does not discuss any early examples and cites approximator examples only dating from the 20th century.

Table 2. First approximator uses of *practically*.

Syntactic context	First approximator use	Examples
Modifier in the NP	1830	(13), (A1)
Modifier of past participle	1831	(14), (A2)
Modifier of PP	1836	(15), (A3)
Modifier of ADJ (predicative position)	1844	(16), (A4)
Modifier in the DP	1848	(17), (A5)
Modifier of V	1848	(18–19), (A6–A7)
Modifier of ADV	1850	(20), (A8)
Modifier of present participle	1852	(21), (A9)
Modifier of ADJ (attributive position)	1863	(22), (A10)

- (15) and the power of the Post Master General to pay them high prices is **practically** without limitation (1836 Jackson, *State of the Union Address*; CEAL)
- (16) for the Greek mariners are **practically** free from the stringency of ship's papers, and where they will, there they go. (1844 Kinglake, *Eothen*; CLMET3.1)
- (17) In the United States to 1860 population has doubled itself about every twenty years, while in France there is **practically** no increase of population. (1848 Mill, *Principles of political economy*; CLMET3.1)¹¹
- (18) And the silver certificates **practically** go through a process of constant redemption by being received for customs dues equally with gold. (1848 Mill, *Principles of political economy*; CLMET3.1)¹²

As noted above, the occurrence of *practically* in medial position within a verb phrase is common, especially in the perfect (following *have*), though following a modal it occurs somewhat less frequently.¹³

- (19) It was not till long after the increasing commerce of Europe had **practically** refuted the ancient prejudices, (1860 *North American Review*; COHA)
- (20) It is **practically** almost unthought of in regard to women, (1850 *New Englander and Yale Review*; COHA)
- (21) One cannot walk along a street, but some friend will come up and inflict a narration, limited entirely to his own view of a case in which he is interested or aggrieved, **practically** ignoring that there can and must be another way of stating it. (1852 Chamber's *English Journal*; CLMET3.1)
- (22) which opens the door to **practically** unlimited issues of paper money (1863 *New Englander and Yale Review*; COHA)

Because of the difficulty of distinguishing clear degree readings from ambiguous readings and form manner/respect readings (see example (12)), I have not attempted to count the percentage of the different types in my corpora. Núñez-Pertejo's (2023: 72–73), who is more confident in making these distinctions (see note 9), finds a rise in the intensifier use of *practically* from the second period of CLMET3.0 (1780–1850) to the third period (1850–1920), from 36.1% to 57.3%, accompanied by a fall in the manner use, from 63.9% to 42.2%. This would be consistent with the first appearance of degree readings in the early to mid 19th century, as observed here.

11 John Stuart Mill in *Principles of political economy* seems to have been an early and frequent user of approximator *practically*.

12 An early, but I think ambiguous, use of *practically* with a verb is the following:

(i) So long as those who take the lead in society, and govern the fashion in this matter, as others govern it in the matter of dress, refuse, as a general rule, to form alliances for life, except with those who **practically** despise house-hold concerns (1836 Alcott, *Management of children in regard to health*; CEAL)

13 The positioning of *practically* before a complex verb phrase is rare, even in the negative:

(i) yet if talent and ambition commanded no more than idleness and stupidity, all men **practically** would be idle and stupid." (1887 Hawthorne, *Confessions and criticisms*; COHA)

(ii) if there was anything in the world that Mrs. Maria Wouwermans **practically** didn't believe in, and didn't mean to believe in, it was "the forgiveness of sins." (1875 Stowe, *We and our neighbors*; COHA)

In respect to the context in which the degree form is most common, Núñez-Pertejo (2023: 72–74) records adjectives and past participles as the most commonly category modified by *practically* (39.8% in CLMET3.0 and 32.3% in OBC), with verbs/verbals (presumably present participles) being the second most common (21.4% in CLMET3.0 and 21.8% in OBC). These results would compare generally with my findings, though we categorize our results somewhat differently. Of the 213 tokens of *practically* in CEAL, I found 180 to be fairly certain examples expressing a degree reading. The syntactic distribution of forms is as shown in Table 3. Thus, using Núñez-Pertejo’s classification, *practically* modifies adjectives and past participles 36.1% of the time and verbs and present participles 27.8% of the time, which are similar to Núñez-Pertejo’s findings.

Table 3. Syntactic distribution of degree adverb/adjunct *practically* in CEAL.

Syntactic context	Number	Percentage
Modifier of V	46	21.6
Modifier of past participle	29	13.6
Modifier of present participle	4	1.9
Modifier of PP	11	5.2
Modifier in the NP	36	16.9
Modifier in the DP	17	8.0
Modifier of ADJ	36	16.9
Modifier of ADV	1	0.5
SUBTOTAL	180	84.5
ADV of manner/respect	33	15.5
TOTAL	213	100

5 Discussion

Returning to the research questions posed in the Section 1, we have seen that the corpus findings presented in Section 4.3 point to the appearance of approximator uses of *practically* in all syntactic contexts in a very confined period from 1830–1863 (R1). As discussed in Section 3.1, manner adverbs are a known source for degree modifiers; this proves to be true as well in the case of *practically* (Section 4.2), as it functions as an adverb of manner in Early Modern English. It also functions as an adverb of respect in the early period, and thus both uses seem to serve as the source for the degree modifier (R2). The semantic change from manner/respect adverb to approximator involves a metonymic change from ‘in practice, in effect, in reality’ to ‘most often the case, for all intents and purposes’ and then to ‘falling short of the expected level’, thus giving rise to the approximator meaning ‘almost, nearly’. This occurs in bridging contexts such as those shown in (12) (R3). Finally, whether the change shown here can be interpreted as a case of grammaticalization and if so, which recognized pathway of change is relevant – from degree adverb to degree adjunct or from degree adjunct to degree adverb (as discussed in Section 3.2) – is taken up in more detail below (R4). An aspect of the grammaticalization pathway involves the difference between predicative and attributive positions in respect to the development of degree meaning (as noted by De Smet 2012). The section ends with an exploration of the rise of negative meaning in the degree adjunct and queries whether the motivation and processes discussed by Ziegeler (2015; 2016) for *nearly* and *almost* are also at work in the case of *practically*.

5.1 Characteristics of grammaticalization

As discussed above (Section 3.2), the development of degree adverbs/adjuncts is seen as a prototypical case of grammaticalization. In the case of *practically*, we see many of the characteristics of grammaticalization that Traugott (2008: 234) recognizes as evident in the development of degree

modifiers. There is desemanticization involving a change from concrete or propositional meaning to abstract or non-propositional (procedural/pragmatic) meaning. This entails a semantic-pragmatic change from a manner/respect adverbial meaning ‘in practice P, in reality P’ to an approximator meaning ‘almost P’ to a counterfactual meaning ‘not (quite) P’. Semantically, we also see subjectification, or the change from non-subjective to an (inter)subjective meaning. Rather than denoting the objectively observed or described manner of an action, the degree adverb expresses the speaker’s subjective placement of the action on a scale. The development of *practically* involves a number of changes which are seen as central to grammaticalization, including decategorialization, host-class expansion, and syntactic context expansion. The decategorialization (or decategorization, see Hopper 1981) of *practically* involves a functional shift from a lexical adverb (a manner/respect adverb) to a grammatical modifier (a degree adverb/adjunct) with loss of the behavioral characteristics of lexical adverbs, such as the ability to be modified by intensifiers or compared, **very practically*, **more practically*. Host-class expansion, in which the class of elements the grammaticalizing object is in construction with is increased (Himmelman 2004: 32–33), is also evident here, with expansion from modifying non-gradable concepts to gradable concepts. In syntactic context expansion (Himmelman 2004: 32–33) *practically* occurs not only with verbs, verbals (participles), and (predicative) adjectives, where the manner adverb is found, but also with NPs, DPs, PPs, and ADVs, where we later commonly find the approximator. We also see some expansion of adjective modification from the predicative to the attributive position. At the same time, there is movement from a freer position for manner/respect adverbs (which may, for example, occur sentence-initially or finally) to a more constrained position for approximators (which must immediately precede the element modified); this is syntactic fixation, as recognized by Lehmann (2015: 181ff.) as characteristic of grammaticalization. Hopper’s grammaticalization principles (1991: 22) of “persistence” (or retention of some the original meaning), of “divergence” (or continued existence of the original lexical form), and of “layering” (or co-existence with or renewal of older approximators) are evident here. In respect to divergence, we still use *practically* as a manner/respect adverb in Present-Day English (see example (3)). In respect to divergence, we find the continued existence of many older approximators, such as *almost* or *nearly*. Persistence is less obvious, though it could be argued that in the use of *practically* as a degree adjunct modifying verbs and verbals, the manner/respect meaning ‘in practice, in reality’ is not entirely absent. Finally, we can even talk about Lehmann’s concept (2015: 141ff.) of “paradigmaticity” here if we understand *practically* not as part of a grammatical paradigm per se but as belonging to a set of elements (i.e., approximators) with a common grammatical value or function (cf. Haselow 2013: 412).¹⁴

5.2 Trajectory of grammaticalization

The narrow range of dates for the appearance of the different degree forms of *practically* (see Table 2) makes it difficult to determine the pathway of grammaticalization, whether, as discussed in Section 3.2, the degree adjunct precedes the degree adverb or the reverse. However, I would argue that it is the appearance of *practically* with the bare verb form,¹⁵ which appears later, rather than its earlier appearance with the past participle which is decisive. The tendency for past participles to be or become lexicalized adjectival forms, especially in copulative constructions, means that *practically* often functions as a degree adverb in this verbal context. The degree adjunct use becomes more or less restricted to the bare verb context. That is, the negative implication of *practically*, or its use as a negative emphaser, is most often found when *practically* modifies a bare verb. Thus, given the later appearance of *practically* with bare verbs, it is the second pathway – from degree adverb to degree adjunct – which seems to be occurring here. The figures cited by Núñez-Pertejo (2023: 73) provide some support for this pathway; she finds that the percentage of adjectives and past participles occurring with *practically* drops over time (from period 2 to period 3) from 53.5% to 38.1% while the percentage of verbs/verbals rises from

¹⁴ Not all features of grammaticalization, such as, for example, phonetic attrition or bonding and coalescence, are found in this case.

¹⁵ The first example of *practically* modifying a bare V in my corpora dates from 1848 (see example (18)). As this example comes from John Stuart Mill, an early adopter of the approximator (see note 16), it may be misleadingly early. In general, use of *practically* with a bare V is not common until 1860–1870.

16.3% to 21.9%, thus pointing to a development from degree adverb to degree adjunct. Note also that this trajectory is consistent with Athanasiadou's (2007) semantic argument involving two steps: first from concrete meaning to intensification (the degree adverb) and then from intensification to emphasis (the degree adjunct), with the latter arising later and being maximally subjective since the emphatic forms express a high (or low) degree of speaker commitment (see Section 3.2).

5.3 Predicative and attributive positions

The use of *practically* as an ADJ modifier occurs first in the predicative position (e.g., *Greek mariners are practically free*, as in (16)) and only (approximately 20 years) later in attributive position (e.g., *a practically perfect respirator* as in (A10a)). This sequence is consistent with what De Smet (2012) finds to be the "actualization" pathway of the approximators *far from* and *all but*. He argues that although these approximators have different starting points and trajectories – *all but* is the external modifier of a predicate NP (e.g., *is all but the whining end*) and *far from* is a predicative adjective followed by a prepositional phrase with a gerundial complement (e.g., *was so far from rejoicing*) – both occur with predicative adjectives (e.g., *was all but miraculous*) before they occur with attributive adjectives (e.g., *a far from insignificant proportion*). According to De Smet (2012), the approximator is used first in contexts which are "most similar to the locus of reanalysis" (615, 618), namely BE/HAVE + past participle, since "the syntactic role of the constituent being modified remains constant ... and the surface sequence ... left unaltered". Once possible with predicative adjectives, it is only "another minimal step to spread to new adjectival contexts" (615). Moreover, "downtoner *far from* is seen to favor positions that conceal its syntactically innovative character, in this case by avoiding immediate consecution of a determiner and *far from* – a sequence that would not be licensed on the old analysis of *far from*" (619). In the case of *practically*, we can see that its position in the predicate of the sentence (i.e., before a predicative adjective or participle (see example (8a)) is consistent with its use as a manner adverb, whereas its appearance in attributive position (see example (8b)) is almost non-existent in the earlier stage (with only two examples in all of EEBO). Thus, the former context represents what De Smet calls the locus of change (along with the pre-verbal position) for the change from manner adverb to degree adverb/adjunct.

5.4 The negative implicature of the degree adjunct

As noted above (Section 1), the degree adjunct use, where *practically* modifies a verb or verbal, carries a "denial of truth value" and "strong negative implicature". We see the same negative meaning in the historical examples ((14), (18), (19), (21), (A2), (A6), (A7), and (A9)), where the event either did not – or realistically could not – occur. For example, in (A2a), the industrial producers were not actually "enslaved"; in (A2c) the roads were not actually "lost"; in (A6c), Massachusetts did not actually "abandon" the development of roads; and so on.

It would seem to be a natural step from 'approximative' meaning (i.e., falling short of a maximum or boundary) to a negative sense. Ziegeler (2015; 2016) provides an historical account for how such a step occurs in the development of "counterfactual" meaning in the approximators *nearly* and *almost*. Looking at the occurrence of these approximators in Late Modern English,¹⁶ she argues that the verbal forms typically modified by *almost* express "events which are either undesirable or unimaginable, i.e., evaluatively negative contexts (E-neg)" (2015: 8; 2016: 13). These are often expressed hyperbolically (e.g., *the intelligence almost paralyzed me*) (2015: 10; 2016: 14). She finds the same to be the case with *nearly* (2015: 11–12), again with hyperbolic meaning common (2015: 13). These approximators come to express the fact that the undesirable or unpleasant situation was averted; that is, there is an "overwhelming tendency to associate counterfactual readings with the avoidance of undesirable circumstances" (2015: 14). This tendency, she argues is the result of intersubjectivity, or the speaker's concern for the addressee's emotion by focusing on the avoidance of something unpleasant (2015: 14; 2016: 19). Thus, the approximator meaning or degree of intensity ('closely P') is reinterpreted as

16 Ziegeler uses an earlier incarnation of *The Corpus of Late Modern English*.

avoidance of an unpleasant situation ('almost, not quite P') and hence the negative implicature we see in the degree adjuncts. This change, she argues, occurs in bridging or ambiguous contexts that allow both the 'closely P' and the 'almost, not quite P' interpretation (2015: 18–19). For example, *they nearly threatened him* could mean that they "sort of" threatened him or that they came close to, but did not actually threaten him. The preferred reading becomes the 'almost, not quite P' reading. Finally, she suggests that the preterite forms take over the E-neg contexts as many participles are intermediate between adjectival and verbal forms (2015: 18).

A tabulation of the verbs and verbal occurring with *practically* in the third periods of both CLMET3.1 and CEAL, covering the dates 1850–1920, seems to confirm Ziegeler's findings. As is the case with *nearly* and *almost*, verbs and verbals with negative prosody seem to predominate with *practically* (see Table 4). Note that for this tabulation some apparently neutral verbs such *handle*, *rule*, or *deliver* were interpreted as having negative prosody because they occurred in a negative context, as in the examples in (23):

- (23) a. I wished her little tribe had been better cared for, better taught and nourished and more **practically handled** than they were; (1885 Linton, *The autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*; CLMET3.1)
- b. This was the Duke Archibald - better known by his earlier title of the Earl of Islay - who [Pg 45] was often called the King of Scotland, because he **practically ruled** the affairs of Scotland in the first half of last century, very much as Dundas did in the second. (1895 Rae; *Life of Adam Smith*; CLMET3.1)
- c. His weakness regarding his eldest son had **practically delivered** him into her hand. (1901 Kingsley, *The history of Sir Richard Calmady*; CLMET 3.1)

We can also see that many of the cases of *practically* modifying verbals ((14), (18), (19), and (21)) are ambiguous in meaning between a 'closely P' and 'almost, not quite P' reading. For example, in (A6a) did they partially destroy ('closely P') the people's power or did they not quite destroy it, though threaten it in some way?

The development of the negative meaning in degree adjunct uses of *practically* thus seems to confirm Ziegeler's argument relating to *nearly* and *almost*.

Table 4. Semantic prosody of verbal elements with *practically* (CLMET3.1 and CEAL, 1850–1920).

	CLMET3.1 (3rd period)		CEAL (3rd period)	
	Negative	Neutral or Positive	Negative	Neutral or Positive
be/have + past participle	arrested, attached, barred, become impossible, been none, brought (to earth), ceased, confined, conquered, converted, cut off delivered, denied, deserted, deprived, dictated, disappeared, enforced, forgotten, grappled with, handled, isolated, left, lived (under rule of force), lost, missed, murdered, restricted, retired, repulsed, silenced, spend, still-born, stopped, unacquainted, known	acquainted, admitted, adopted, applied, arranged, attained, carried out, combined, completed, contemplated, decided, done, given, grown, maintained, used, made up, modelled, reached, recovered, regarded, reproduced, said, settle, reserved, wanted	annihilated, ceased, consigned, cowed, deserted, destroyed, driven out, forced, forgotten, (malevolence) unlimited, (never) known, ostracized, retired, ruined, said (nothing), thrown (at his head), vanquished, wiped out	convinced, known, guaranteed, incorporated, made (plans), presented, reared, said, settled, sold, succeeded, unexposed
Verb	preclude, ruled, disappear, disinherited, did (nothing), gives up, insisted, issued (against), not think, preclude, ruled, shirks, threw upon, vanishes	admits, adopted, addressed, agree, amounts to, applied, assist, began, benefit, earn expressed, faced, interest, introduced, know, live, means, put, recorded, say, transferred,	admit (guilt), control, convicted, cut, disqualified, disregard, don't know, insisted, instigate, left, lost, made (them prisoners)	accompanied, add, adopt, be (simple), do, have (it all), keeps (perfect time), knew, moved

6 Concluding remarks

In contrast to most research in the area of degree modifiers, which focuses on the development of amplifiers such as *very* (e.g., Breban & Davidse 2016), this paper has focused on the development of an approximator of fairly recent origin, *practically*. Following the borrowing of *practical* in the early 16th century, *practically* became a common manner/respect adverb from the late 16th century onward. It functioned solely as a manner/respect adverb meaning ‘in practice, in reality’ in Early Modern English and was found in the slot before verbs and participles and before adjectives in predicative position. Beginning in Late Modern English, in ambiguous or “bridging contexts”, the manner meaning could be reinterpreted as ‘most often the case, for all intents and purposes’ and hence as falling short of the expected level, thus giving rise to the approximator meaning ‘almost, virtually, nearly’. In the mid-19th century unambiguous approximators in all of the positions found in Present-day English (modifying ADJs, ADVs, PPs, present and past participles, and bare verbs, and as modifiers in the NP and DP) appear within a span of 35 years. The change from a lexical adverb to a degree modifier can be understood as a process of grammaticalization, involving decategorialization (functional shift), host-class expansion, syntactic context expansion, desemanticization, semantic-pragmatic change (from ‘in practice P’ > ‘almost P’ > ‘not (quite) P’), and subjectification, as well as persistence, divergence, and layering. Given the almost simultaneous appearance of the approximator in all contexts, the grammaticalization trajectory is difficult to determine; however, the later appearance of *practically* before bare verbs with negative implicature points to the route from manner/respect adverb > degree adverb > degree adjunct (cf. Traugott 2008; Brinton & Inoue 2020; Brinton 2021). With lexical adjectives, the approximator occurs first in predicative position and only later in attributive position, most likely because the predicative position is closest to the locus for reanalysis (BE/HAVE + past participle); the position after the determiner is avoided because of its “conspicuous novelty” (De Smet 2012: 618). Finally, the negative implicature arises with the degree adjunct use (before past participles and, especially, bare verbs), most likely because of the preponderance here of verbs with negative semantic prosody, where ‘almost P’ is reinterpreted as ‘not (quite) P’, motivated by subjectification (see Ziegeler 2015; 2016).

The rise of new degree modifiers is an ongoing process in the history of English, extending well into the Late Modern English period (and beyond). This case study of the rise of a specific approximator contributes generally to our understanding of the grammaticalization of degree modifiers, but also points to the need for more such studies, as each degree modifier seems to follow its own pathway. Generalizations about the trajectories taken from source adverb to degree modifier must be made with circumspection as a “well-known trajectory” (Méndez-Naya 2008b) may not apply to all cases.

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Appendix

A1 Modifier in the NP

- a. he died August 26, 1891, having accomplished wondrous deeds for the Wisconsin Historical Society, of which he was **practically** the founder, and for thirty-three years the main stay; (1831 Withers, *Chronicles of border warfare*; CEAL)
- b. by showing **practically** the only proper use of wealth (1844 Dibble, *Thoughts on missions*; COHA)
- c. It is a definite fact that the old slave States have hitherto received **practically** none of this vast foreign immigration. (1848 Mill, *Principles of political economy*; CLMET3.1)
- d. where the landlord has done **practically** nothing for his tenant, (1856 *Buchanan's Journal of Man*; COHA)

A2 Modifier of past participle

- a. by the false and fraudulent policy by which the people, the industrious producers, of so many nations have been impoverished, and **practically** enslaved, (1839 *US Democratic Review*; COHA)
- b. and has **practically** proved how beautifully they may be brought to harmonize, (1849 Irving, *The sketch-book of Geoffrey Crayon*; COHA)
- c. The network of roads and railways and telegraph wires – agencies in the formation of which individual labours were so merged as to be **practically** lost (1862 Spencer, *First principles*; CLMET3.1)

A3 Modifier of PP

- a. ascribing a self-repairing quality to the calamities which befell the laboring-classes, **practically** of no validity (1848 Mill, *Principles of political economy*; CLMET3.1)
- b. Sound-minded, self-possessed, ever on the alert, ever busy, he was always **practically** in earnest. (1850 *New Englander and Yale Review*; COHA)
- c. he was in very good credit—he could lend 10,000l., 20,000l., or 30,000l. to persons, **practically** on his own responsibility (1867 Trial of James Freeling Wilkenson, t18670107-170; OB)

A4 Modifier of ADJ (predicative position)

- a. By an unlimited quantity is of course not meant literally, but **practically** unlimited: a quantity beyond the use which can in any, or at least in present circumstances, be made of it. (1848 Mill, *Principles of political economy*; CLMET3.1)
- b. It was a war with a power whose wealth and credit were **practically** inexhaustible, (1849 Seward, *Life and public service of John Quincy Adams*; CEAL)
- c. this principle is liable to some important modifications. Thus, it /z/ is **practically** true, only in so far as men continue to be operated upon by the hope of reward. (1852 Wayland, *The elements of political economy*; COHA)

A5 Modifier in the DP

- a. Hence it is correct to say that **practically** all bills originate in the Federal Council. (1881 *Harpers*; COHA)
- b. In the war of the rebellion we had **practically** half the Northern people arrayed in active opposition to the Government. (1881 *Scribners*; COHA)
- c. it gave the secretary **practically** all his time to devote to the work of the government. (1883 *Atlantic Monthly*; COHA)
- d. Now, however, **practically** every Liberal candidate goes for restriction of the liquor traffic, (1893 Bryce, *Political organizations in the United States and England*; COHA)

A6 Modifier of V (simple V)

- a. so fast as they could do it without alarming the people for their liberties, have, by indirection, denied, undermined, and **practically** destroyed their power (1852 Spooner, *Essays on the trial by jury*; COHA)
- b. the whole business of the company **practically** went through his hands, and the company rested very much upon him (1867 Trial of James Freeling Wilkinson, t18670107-170; OB)
- c. Massachusetts **practically** abandoned the development of the roads already constructed, and turned her whole hopes and built for her whole future upon the construction of opposing lines. (1869 *North American Review*; COHA)

A7 Modifier of complex V (medial position)

- a. in my opinion he will **practically** lose his sight of the right eye (1883 Trial of Sarah Ann Newman, t18831119-99; OB)
- b. it might go on in a way which might **practically** cause the destruction of the jawbone (1886 Trial of Adelaide Bartlett, George Dyson, t18860405-466; OB)
- c. so that icy obstructions may be normal for a number of years, and then, for only a season or two, may **practically** disappear. (1889 *North American Review*; COHA)
- d. cases of fraud such as these would **practically** disappear from the judicial registers. (1892 Galton, *Fingerprints*; CLMET3.1)

A8 Modifier of ADV

- a. which is worth less than the specie in which it is by law redeemable, though **practically** never redeemed. (1859 *North American Review*; COHA)
- b. the German artillery was usually in advance of the infantry line, and often really decided the battle when **practically** entirely without their infantry supports. (1874 *Harpers*; COHA)
- c. the bullet went upwards; I think it went **practically** directly inwards, as if fired point blank from front backwards (1884 Trial of Elizabeth Gibbons, t18841215-126; OB)

A9 Modifier of present participle

- a. The Germans, in that part of the town almost devoted to themselves, have succeeded in **practically** abolishing the Sabbath, as they utterly ignore that divine institution even as a day of rest, (1856 Bird, *The English woman in America*; COHA)
- b. I knew, as far as regards the notes, that a false account in my writing was laid before the, and I knew that from week to week I was **practically** deceiving my employers as far as that goes. (1856 Trial of Edward Greenland, t18661022-933; OB)

A10 Modifier of ADJ (attributive position)

- a. and if these could be removed, a **practically** perfect respirator might possibly be obtained. (1871 *Fragments of science*; COHA)
- b. it is as evidently erroneous to the author, and will be to ... all others at some future day, as the **practically** rejected doctrine of the predestination of souls to damnation or salvation. (1875 Eddy, *Science and health*; COHA)