

A POINT ABOUT 'IN' AND 'INTO'

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There is an old 'working rule' that *into* is used when movement is suggested (*He jumped into the river*), *in* when there is no movement (*I lay in bed*). This is too imprecise to be of much practical value, but it might be refined: *in* when rest is indicated, or when the movement is confined to one place (*She tossed about in bed, They're swimming in the river*); *into* when the movement is from one place to another (*She danced into the street*, i.e. from a building, as opposed to *She danced in the street*).

Sharply contrasting situations make *in* and *into* mutually exclusive also in such pairs as *They rode in the mountains* and *They rode into the mountains* (from the plain); *We can walk in the wood* (now we are running) and *We can walk into the wood*; *You can't drive in the park* and *You can't drive into the park*; *We couldn't move in the hall* (we were there and so were hundreds of others) and *We couldn't move into the hall* (we wanted to get there); *Blood flowed in the streets* and *Blood flowed into the streets* (a nice distinction!).

In selecting between *in* and *into* the situation has thus to be kept in mind. Is there, however, a modern tendency (in British English) to use *in* and not *into* for 'motion towards', at least where there is no danger of the situation being misunderstood? The suspicion that there is drove me to the files of the Survey of English Usage being conducted at University College, London, under the supervision of Professor Randolph Quirk, to whom I am grateful for advice and for the opportunity of this first probing. How common, within the range of the material being exhaustively encarded and analysed there, are sentences such as *He jumped in the river* (i.e. from the bank, and not because he was snapped at by an angry fish), *She put it in her basket*, or *He got in the taxi*?

To begin with, the record cards bearing occurrences of *into* occupy two centimetres of space in the filing cabinet, while those bearing occurrences of *in* occupy twenty-four centimetres. Since there was only one occurrence on each card, *in* therefore occurred (a fact of marginal interest here) about twelve times as often as *into* in the 120,000 running words covered by the Survey. This corpus consists about two-thirds of printed material (mainly books) and about one-quarter of speech (much of it conversation taken 'unawares'), all of this coming from university-educated speakers or writers.

An examination of just under half of the cards registering occurrences of *in* brought to light some 300 instances in which *in* had reference to position or place, as in *in our house, in Spain, in the Preface, in the refrain, in the country*. Only one instance of *in* with a verb of motion was found—*let me put this in my bag*.

The 142 occurrences of *into* recorded could be grouped, though not exhaustively, into those in which the substitution of *in* might be permissible without change of

meaning and those where it would not. Thus *settled into a good seat, get into trouble, he has looked into his heart, air traffic into and out of Paris, plunged into the sea, come into the picture, and take the law into their own hands* fall in (or into) the first category whereas *developed into a poem, had a bed moved into the outhouse, moving into the flats, and enlarged into a complicated brain* belong to the second. The decisive factor is the situational one. If there are two possible situations, a choice of *in* or *into* is obligatory.

The point about the tendency remains undecided. It may be that, if such a tendency exists, it is associated with a small number of verbs, such as *get, take, put, and jump*, or that it characterises informal and rapid conversation only. Samples need to be taken from informal registers and other sources of spoken English. Meanwhile, for written English at least, and in Britain, the rough-and-ready rule (*into* for 'motion toward', *in* for 'rest') seems to be fairly reliable, though it may well be, as R. Quirk and D. Crystal have suggested,¹ that in certain contexts both *in* and *into* come into contrast with, say, *from* and belong to a 'subsystem' within the whole 'system' of prepositions.

NOTES

¹ R. Quirk and D. Crystal, 'On Scales of Contrast in Connected English Speech', *In Memory of J. R. Firth* 359 (London, 1966).

RESUMÉ

Poznámka o *in* a *into*

V jistých typech angličtiny je pravděpodobně tendence užívat *in* a nikoli *into* se slovy označujícími „pohyb směrem k“, ale v rozsáhlém materiálu excerpovaném z psaných i mluvených projevů vysokoškolsky vzdělaných mluvčích byl pouze jeden případ uvedeného užití *in*.