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 encoded 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


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 mluvcích byl pouze jeden případ uvedeného užití in.