

## TEXTUAL INPUT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES: ENRICHING INPUT THROUGH GENRE ANALYSIS

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In this paper, I explore the presence and function of English motion patterns in a corpus comprising various narrative genres, and suggest ways in which research into their rhetorical function might complement other approaches in the literature as well as help teachers introduce Spanish learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to this idiosyncratic feature of English narratives. The working hypothesis is that the use of motion patterns may also be influenced by genre. This genre approach to motion patterns may, on the one hand, shed some light on the rhetorical or communicative motivation of motion patterns in English and, on the other, help teachers choose and exploit the best input in order to include such patterns in the EFL classroom in a way that goes beyond a lexical- or grammatical-only approach, that is, one that focuses on the pragmatic aspects involved in the use of motion patterns.

Keywords: manner of motion verbs, narrative genres, input, cross-linguistic influence, typological differences, EFL teaching-learning

The role of the native language (NL or L1) in shaping the interlanguage of people trying to learn a language different from their own (i.e. ‘transfer’ or ‘cross-linguistic influence’) has received great attention by Foreign Language Teaching and Second Language Acquisition scholars (e.g. Lado 1957; Faerch and Kasper 1983; Davies *et al* 1984; Kellerman and Sharwood-Smith 1986; Odlin 1989; Gass and Selinker 1992). Among the factors involved, much discussion has focused on the weight of input in cross-linguistic influence. For rather than being unrelated, both affect each other, as summarized by Selinker in the following terms:

Language transfer is best thought of as a cover term for a whole class of behaviours, processes and constraints, each of which has to do with CLI, i.e. the influence and use of prior linguistic knowledge, usually but not exclusively NL knowledge. This knowledge intersects with input from the TL and with universal properties of various sorts in a selective way to help build IL.<sup>1</sup> (1992: 208)

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations correspond to the following: CLI: Crosslinguistic Influence; NL: Native Language; TL: Target Language; IL: Interlanguage.

The expression of motion events is one of the topics where the impact of cross-linguistic influence and input appears to be particularly noteworthy. For instance, Bowerman (1996) has pointed to the significance of the input language in the way children learn how to express spatial notions (and, among them, motion) in their L1. In turn, Berman and Slobin (1994) conducted cross-linguistic research where they claim that the impact of L1 on the outcome of children in describing motion events rests upon typological differences across languages.

One such difference involves the lexicalization of manner in the main verb of expressions conveying the displacement of a given entity from one place to another (motion patterns hereafter), which is a conspicuous characteristic of languages like English. In contrast, Spanish motion verbs are typically concerned with the trajectory of motion, and additional information (e.g. manner or cause of motion) is expressed by means of adverbial phrases and other constructions playing an adverbial role. Accordingly, Spanish students tend to use a verb like *go* to convey a motion event in English, and use various linguistic devices (typically, '-ing' forms and prepositional phrases) to express the way it was effected. Consider, for instance, sentences like *He went running to his house* or *He went to the bathroom in a hurry* (retrieved from my students' production), both of which are congruent with the linguistic realization of motion events in Spanish.

Bearing in mind these issues, the question is how Foreign Language teachers can overcome some of the problems derived from cross-linguistic influence – particularly, in those cases where the L1 and the L2 are typologically different. Given the weight of input in the process, the importance of choosing the language data most appropriate to cover the learners' needs cannot be underestimated. The first thing to be addressed, then, is how teachers can identify such input.

The present paper is concerned with exploring the way manner of motion verbs occur in English narratives since this is the context where they are typically used and, in this regard, it attempts to provide some answers to the foregoing question. The verbs are approached from the vantage point of genre, that is, the emphasis is placed on how they are used to describe agentive displacements – motion events – in several narrative genres (i.e. in communicative situations involving concrete participants, clear rhetorical goals and recognizable textual artifacts). Together with responding to a professional concern (the expression of agentive motion being one of the puzzles Spanish students need to solve in order to use English in a native-like fashion), the research into how manner of motion verbs are used in various narrative genres described here may well exemplify the first step in choosing input to teach those verbs in the L2 classroom. In this sense, although my main objective here is to discuss the diverse aspects underlying the use of the motion verbs in English narratives, insights gleaned from this description may have pedagogical implications as well.

### **1. The expression of agentive motion across languages**

The lexicalization of manner in the main verb of a clause is a conspicuous characteristic of languages like English, and nowhere is this more evident than in motion verbs (see, for instance, the detailed list of such verbs in Faber and Mairal 1999: 280-83). The topic

has been approached from various perspectives which may be broadly seen as responding to two types of concern. Some researchers have framed it within the discussion on the lexico-semantic properties of verbs and their effect on the syntactic behavior of the patterns – or ‘constructions’ in certain approaches – where they appear (Fillmore, 1968, 1977; Lehrer, 1974; Guerssel *et al* 1985; Jackendoff 1990; Van Valin 1990; Dowty 1991; Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1992; Levin 1993; Tenny 1994; Kaufmann 1995; Goldberg 1995, 1998; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998; *inter alia*).

The phenomenon has also been approached from a typological or contrastive perspective, which has given rise to a growing interest in how motion events are expressed in languages such as Basque (Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2006), Japanese (Kita 1999), French versus Germanic languages (Vinay and Darbelnet 1958; Malblanc 1968) and Spanish versus English (Slobin 1996, 2004; Mora Gutiérrez 2001; Morimoto 2001), to list but a few of the languages under survey. Given the weight of the typological differences between the learners’ L1 and the L2 in the learning process (and, particularly, in the above-mentioned phenomenon of language transfer or interlanguage), the insights derived from contrastive approaches to the expression of motion across languages are particularly relevant for the purposes of this paper.

Indeed, English and Spanish epitomize two discrepant strategies for conveying motion events, and are set up as the prototypical exponents of what are known as ‘satellite-framed languages’ (henceforth S-languages) and ‘verb-framed languages’ (henceforth V-languages) after the work by Talmy (1985, 1988, 1991). The main parameter underlying this typology concerns the ways in which languages express the trajectory or path of movement in motion descriptions, that is, whether path is lexicalized as a satellite of the main verb in the clause or as the verb itself. In English (and other S-languages like Dutch or Danish) verbs often encode rich information concerning manner, cause and/or movement but need an adverbial (the ‘satellite’) to convey the path of motion. In contrast, in Spanish and Romance languages in general, verbs are mainly concerned with trajectory or path, and additional information (manner or cause of motion) is expressed by means of sentence constituents playing an adverbial role. By way of illustration, consider the following example:

- (1) El hombre salió de su casa            de puntillas  
 The man    went out of his house    on tiptoe  
 “The man tiptoed out of the house”

In (1) the direction of motion is conveyed in the main verb in the clause (*salir*), and other information is articulated by means of the verb complementation (*de puntillas*). In contrast, the various dimensions of motion subsumed under the general notion of manner are conflated in the main verb (*tiptoe*) in the English version, while a prepositional group (*out of the house*) expresses the direction (*out of*) and landmark (*the house*) of motion.

These typological differences have been seen as underlying differences of rhetorical style across languages, which have been explained as resting upon those motion aspects backgrounded or foregrounded by their linguistic expression (Talmy 1985, 1991; Slobin 1996, 2003, 2004). Thus, verbs in S-languages usually encode rich information about the particulars of motion, and their lexicons have developed well-furnished repositories

of manner of motion verbs. This lexical richness has been aided by another characteristic feature of some such languages, namely the possibility of turning nouns into verbs by means of adjoining a motion particle to them (e.g. *herd in/out/off*, *pirouette in/out/off*). A final characteristic feature of S-languages is the possibility of accumulating several paths within the same linguistic expression (what is known as ‘event conflation’), which is usually done by adding diverse particles or prepositional groups to a single verb, as in *Jill skated up and down along the fence*.

Conversely, event conflation is rare in V-languages. Thus, the Spanish equivalent to the example above would require the use of as many verbs as paths are involved in *up*, *down* and *along* or, simply, the choice of a neutral expression and the omission of certain details. In other words, V-languages tend to use path verbs with satellite manner expressions. As a result, path of motion is backgrounded in the expressions while the particulars of motion (when specified) are placed after the verb and, hence, are foregrounded. In contrast, S-languages downplay motion itself as well as manner or cause of motion by expressing these aspects through the main verb in the clause, and place the focus on path via the verb complementation. Accordingly, narratives written in a V-language like Spanish have been characterized as particularly focused on static-scene elaboration whereas narratives written in English and other S-languages are characterized by placing narrative attention on the path(s) of motion, that is, on the very dynamics of movement.

Such differences as these among languages may exert a greater degree of cross-linguistic influence on the development of learners’ interlanguage than might be the case where the L1 of the foreign language learners and the target language are typologically close. Thus, a Spanish learner of English may either transfer L1 patterns in his/her interlanguage (producing *I came down to university walking*, for example, rather than the preferred English expression *I walked down to university*) or avoid or under-use the lexical resources of the target language by preferring to use verbs that express path at the expense of manner of motion (for example, by producing *He crossed the river* instead of the also possible *He jumped/leaped/swam/waded across the river*). This tendency may be present not only in early stages of acquisition, but may later fossilize and become a defining feature of the interlanguage of Spanish speakers of English. Cadierno’s (2004) research into cross-linguistic influence in the expression of motion events by Danish learners of Spanish finds evidence of L1 influence on L2 production, which she relates not only to the learners’ general proficiency but also to their awareness of the similarities and differences between these two languages. These findings suggest that learning to use motion verbs in a typologically different language will involve learners’ having sufficient exposure to the way the target language encodes motion events in order to develop this awareness of differences as well as a familiarity with the preferred target language patterns.

In short, providing V-language learners of an S-language (for example, Spanish learners of English) with textual input rich in motion verbs may be crucial in fostering the learners’ command of this aspect of the language they are attempting to learn. However, locating and identifying texts which display these features is not always a straightforward matter, as discussed in the next section.

## **2. Choosing input: method and results**

One of the starting premises of the research summarized in this paper is that, although typological differences between Spanish and English have an impact on the learners' production of motion expressions, this may not be the only factor involved. Indeed, given the premise that the different way(s) in which languages are used to communicate respond to factors other than the lexico-grammatical resources available, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that in order to make an appropriate use of motion verbs (in fact, of any other language device) one needs to know not only the *what* and the *how*, but also, and most importantly, the *when* and *what for* aspects underlying their use. The need to adopt a discourse approach in order to explore the expression of motion events is also posited by Slobin as follows:

The satellite- versus verb-framed typology ... is not particularly satisfying for discourse analysis, because what is most interesting is the impact of various additional options on the structure of narrative and the allocation of attention – especially to features of path and manner. Rather than put languages into typological categories, it might be more profitable to lay out the collection of factors that, together, interact to contribute to particular rhetorical styles. The linguistic locus of path expression is only one of such factors ... cultural patterns of narrative style can act to foster or limit repetition and elaboration of path components (2004: 24-25).

Taking Slobin's caveat as the starting point, an exploration of the form and function of motion verbs in English narratives was deemed a necessary prerequisite for designing classroom activities on the topic which, in turn, required building a narrative corpus. Two criteria determined the compilation of the texts in the corpus. In the first place, narrative was seen as a 'macro-genre' or 'genre colony' (Bhatia 1999) that subsumes several narrative genres which, although they broadly share a similar concern with recounting events and display a recognizable narrative rhetorical patterning at a basic level, may be further differentiated from each other in agreement with their prototypical participants (both authors and audiences), purposes, topics and, presumably, use of language. Given the hypothesis that differences – albeit subtle ones – among narrative genres might determine the use of motion expressions, the corpus needed to include texts illustrating different narrative genres.

The choice of texts was also influenced by the – future – pedagogical applications of the study. Accordingly, the narratives finally chosen were those that dealt with topics regarded as appealing to 18-to-20 year-old undergraduates, and that illustrated various English dialects (British and American) as well as discourse modes (oral and written). The resulting corpus comprised the following texts retrieved from both written and online sources:

- 16 recollections (10,874 words)
- 47 folk stories (10.497 words)
- 7 literary fairy/ghost stories (11.148 words)
- 94 anecdotes written by teenagers (11,171 words)
- 18 historical and biographical texts (9,401 words)
- 24 news reports (10,777 words)

These 206 texts (63,868 words) were examined with the help of a concordancer in order to see how many motion verbs occurred in them. Although the exploration yielded numerous instances, not all the occurrences were taken into account. Bearing in mind a class of learners with an intermediate level of competence in English, only those cases expressing actual, physical motion were chosen for analysis. This criterion ruled out language concerned with figurative or fictive, that is, non-physical motion (e.g. fixed expressions like *jump out of one's skin*). These were kept for a further study into the figurative uses of motion verbs (see Lindstromberg and Boers 2005 in this respect). Finally, the analysis pivoted on three research questions: (1) How often are motion constructions used throughout the corpus and across different genres? (2) How often are manner verbs used overall and across genres? and (3) What rhetorical purpose motivates the use of motion constructions?

The corpus data yielded 524 motion instances (tokens) incorporating 99 different types of verb. These are shown in Table 1:

N° of instances	Verbs
More than 100 instances	<i>go</i> (114)
50-100 instances	<i>get</i> (65), <i>come</i> (60)
25-50 instances	<i>run</i> (30), <i>walk</i> (27)
10-24 instances	<i>sit down</i> (10), <i>turn</i> (16), <i>fall</i> (14), <i>rush</i> (11)
5-9 instances	<i>jump</i> (9), <i>move</i> (9), <i>climb</i> (6), <i>hang</i> (6), <i>return</i> (5), <i>swim</i> (5)
2-4 instances	<i>be on one's way</i> (4), <i>pull</i> (4), <i>head</i> (4), <i>travel</i> (4), <i>sneak</i> (4), <i>start off/out</i> (4), <i>wander</i> (4), <i>bump</i> (4), <i>burst</i> (3), <i>leap</i> (3), <i>drive</i> (3), <i>set off</i> (3), <i>fly</i> (3), <i>march</i> (3), <i>step</i> (3), <i>bolt</i> (2), <i>stand up</i> (2), <i>circle</i> (2), <i>clamber</i> (2), <i>crash</i> (2), <i>cross</i> (2), <i>descend</i> (2), <i>gather</i> (2), <i>land</i> (2), <i>lie down</i> (2), <i>lunge</i> (2), <i>make</i> (2), <i>pop</i> (2), <i>stumble</i> (2), <i>tumble</i> (2)
1 instance	<i>arrive</i> , <i>blade</i> , <i>continue</i> , <i>cordon</i> , <i>crawl</i> , <i>creep</i> , <i>curl</i> , <i>cycle</i> , <i>dance</i> , <i>demonstrate</i> , <i>feel one's way</i> , <i>file</i> , <i>flail</i> , <i>flee</i> , <i>fold</i> , <i>follow</i> , <i>help</i> , <i>hurl</i> , <i>hurry</i> , <i>knock</i> , <i>launch</i> , <i>lean</i> , <i>let</i> , <i>lift</i> , <i>mess</i> , <i>nip</i> , <i>paddle</i> , <i>parade</i> , <i>perk</i> , <i>pile</i> , <i>pirouette</i> , <i>race</i> , <i>ride</i> , <i>roam</i> , <i>roll</i> , <i>scamper</i> , <i>screech to a halt</i> , <i>scuttle</i> , <i>settle</i> , <i>ship</i> , <i>sink</i> , <i>skid</i> , <i>slam</i> , <i>slow</i> , <i>spin</i> , <i>splash</i> , <i>spring</i> , <i>swerve</i> , <i>take off</i> , <i>tear</i> , <i>topple</i> , <i>twist</i> , <i>waddle</i> , <i>wave</i>

Table 1. Types and tokens of motion verbs in corpus

Verbs such as *hang*, *start* or *tear* are included in table 1 because they occur with motion particles which turn them into motion verbs (e.g. *I noticed a group of fit guys hanging out across the street* or *We started off in pouring rain*). This is also the case with

the verbs *sit down*, *lie down* and *stand up* – unconcerned with motion without their particles.

Of course, the high occurrence of verbs like *go*, *get*, *come*, *walk* or *run* was expected. Added to those occurring at least 10 times in the corpus, these represent 66.2% of the motion expressions in the corpus. This not only confirms the productivity of such verbs (most of which are manner neutral), but also appears to support the arguments towards their archetypal, conceptually basic nature in Clark (1978), Bowerman (1989), Langacker (1991) and Goldberg (1995), *inter alia*. Thus, as pointed out by these scholars, verbs such as *go*, *get* or *come* are among the first verbs that children acquire, as well as among the verbs most frequently used to describe personal experiences. The other 33.8% comprise expressions with less ‘everyday’ verbs, most of which convey motion in a more graphic or vivid way (e.g. *file*, *pirouette*, *nip*, *tumble*, *waddle* or *topple*). A more detailed account of the meaning potential of such verbs is provided in section 3 of this study.

In order to explore whether the use of motion verbs responded to genre constraints, I started by quantifying the motion instances in the corpus, which meant paying attention to (a) the number of instances per genre and their percentage in the corpus, and (b) the lexical density regarding motion displayed by each genre (i.e. the ratio of verb ‘types’ to all the occurrences of motion expressions or ‘tokens’)<sup>2</sup>. This quantification rendered the following results:

Genre	N° of instances (tokens)	% in corpus	N° of types	Lexical density
Recollections	69	13.1%	19	27.5
Folk stories	133	25.3%	23	17.3
Literary tales	96	18.2%	32	33.3
Anecdotes	184	35%	62	33.7
Historical and biographical narratives	20	3.8%	8	40
News stories	22	4.6%	12	54.5

Table 2. Motion patterns across genres.

As shown in table 2, the largest number of motion verbs in this particular corpus is found in personal anecdotes, folk stories and literary tales, which are also the genres displaying both the widest range of particles and event conflation instances in the corpus – the latter largely responsible for the dynamism attributed to S-languages. This appears to explain the propensity of certain narrative genres to use motion expressions. Corpus data also suggest that dynamism and lexical density are not necessarily related. Thus, although less dynamic than other genres in the corpus, both news stories and historical texts show the highest lexical density when compared to folk stories and anecdotes, which display a lower lexical density.

<sup>2</sup> Lexical density is the result of dividing the number of verb types by the number of motion tokens and multiplying it by 100.

Nevertheless, although quantification may help confirm the dynamism displayed by English narratives in general, exploring whether the use of motion expressions is genre-sensitive required a more qualitative type of research. This involved paying attention to the verbs used in each genre since the tone or coloring and, to a large extent, the rhetorical effects of the texts, largely depend on the verb used to articulate how a given displacement took place. In other words, choice of verb points to those aspects other than lexical availability underlying the various ways of reporting events in narrative texts. Among these pragmatic and, more specifically, genre-related aspects we find the topic, participants (together with the related notion of register) and rhetorical goal(s) characterizing different narrative genres.

### 3. The rhetorical motivation of motion patterns in narrative genres

The genres in the corpus may be broadly classified into two types according to their planned or unplanned (and, accordingly, formal or informal) nature. The first group comprises news stories and historical texts, both prototypically written genres characterized by the professional status of their authors and their recognizable topics such as history, politics, society and the like. The second group consists of recollections and folk stories, both originally oral genres (an origin often traceable in their written form) dealing with diverse topics. Teenage anecdotes would fall somewhere in between. Thus, although written to be published in magazines (which suggests that some attention has been paid to the language used in them), their authors are teenagers who appear to write as they talk. The texts are therefore often reminiscent of their oral counterparts, yet devoid of interjections, pauses, repetitions and so forth. Likewise, literary tales are difficult to classify: they originate from those folk narratives and tales in the second group, as illustrated by some of the tales' features, typically register, yet are often written by well-known or professional authors who pay attention to the language resources used in them. In this sense, they might well be included in the first group of narratives.

#### 3.1. *The participants, topic and spatiotemporal context of genres and the use of motion verbs*

The above classification, albeit somewhat simplistic, can be useful in order to explain the differences in the use of motion verbs across the genres in the corpus, particularly those responding to such factors as the genres' typical participants, topic(s) and the spatiotemporal context reflected in the texts.

Concerning the first aspect, differences may be broadly seen as responding to the planned nature of the narratives in news stories or historical texts and to the more literate quality of their respective authors – and plausibly, their readership – which contrasts with the somewhat less planned, more vernacular style of recollections and folk stories. In this sense, we must bear in mind that the authors of news stories and historical texts are paid for their narratives: writing stories is their job, and language is their main working tool – and, of course, one that requires a high level of proficiency. Accordingly, they need to pay attention to vocabulary in order to avoid repetition and/or to achieve rhetorically effective texts. Literary tales also display a rich



vocabulary, partly because of their literary status – which, to some extent, differentiates them from their oral, folk-like counterparts – and partly because they may be seen as largely contributing to developing the literacy of their often very young readers. At the same time, the topics dealt with in these three genres may influence the diversity of verbs found in them. Thus, tales often deal with adventurous events and, therefore, need verbs such as *roam, climb, crawl, clamber, descend, spring* or *rush* to convey their characters' tribulations. In turn, news reports use motion verbs to describe either the displacements of the people in the news (e.g. *cross, travel, fly, flee*, often involving means of transport) or their – usually political – actions (e.g. *demonstrate, march, cordon*). In other words, many such verbs are indicators of the topic(s) of the stories they help narrate.

Together with topic, the particular use of the language of recollections and folk tales also appears to respond to the specific spatiotemporal context and knowledge shared by their discourse participants. Most of these narratives belong to the oral and written lore of rural and fishing communities. Accordingly, the language used in them reflects their participants' daily lives and routines, which may well motivate the use of such 'colorless' verbs as *walk, jump, come, turn, go* and *run*, as well as verbs like *paddle* (the latter less common in other contexts, yet highly recurrent in communities whose life pivots on water resources). In short, the vocabulary (motion or otherwise) used in the stories written by and for such communities reflects their particular concerns, hobbies and daily routines.

The verbs found in teenage anecdotes also point to the topics dealt with in the stories, most of which concern their authors' interactions with their various crushes and classmates, and their displacements to and from school, to their friends' or to the places where they spend their leisure time. It is not surprising, then, to find verbs like *cycle, dance, swim, hang around* and, of course, the all-pervasive *walk, run, come* and *go*. The high occurrence of the verb *get* to refer to all sorts of actions and the use of *sneak, nip* or *pop* in the texts may also be indicative of their authors' age, as well as of a particular aspect of register, namely, group solidarity. A case in point in this respect is the propensity of the authors of anecdotes to use terms like *boyf, bf* or *comfy* instead of *boyfriend, best friend* and *comfortable* respectively. Likewise, their use of certain verbs may also reflect a particular, age-specific use of language – possibly encouraged by the very magazines in which the anecdotes are published, whose occasional contributors and regular writing staff use the same expressions. A final aspect worth noticing is the number of verbs that carry negative, even violent connotations in the teenage corpus (e.g. *bump, crash, knock, skid, stumble, topple*) or verbs with an evaluative bias, that is, which encode the authors' stance or subjective views towards the motion events they help articulate (e.g. *sneak, mess* or *waddle*).<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, apart from the greater or lesser motion-specific information encapsulated in the verbs in the corpus, an interesting issue worth investigating is the type of predication conveyed through some such verbs in certain genres, particularly

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<sup>3</sup> My use of *evaluative* covers such notions as 'perspective', 'subjectivity', 'point of view' or 'authorial stance', and draws heavily upon the all-encompassing definition provided by Hunston and Thompson (2000) in their introductory chapter of a book on the subject. In Stein and Wright (1995) the notions above are subsumed by the cover term *subjectivity*.

those typically used to predicate something of non-human animate subjects. In other words, whereas verbs like *arrive*, *go*, *hurry* or *walk* refer to human displacement, other verbs are typically used to refer to the actions of non-human entities, often animals (e.g. *bolt* and *waddle* bring to mind horses and ducks respectively). As happens with the various types of figurative language instantiating cross-domain mappings, such verbs carry entailments related to the attributes of the animals whose movement they express. In this sense, the verbs may be seen as slipping information from those non-human domains of experience and entities into the predication of their human subjects. The interest of these verbs, then, lies in the quality of the information added, and, often, in the positive or negative connotations of the predication conveyed through them.

This is the case of verbs such as *bolt*, *creep*, *lunge*, *roam*, *scamper*, *waddle*, *crawl*, *nip* and *spring*, all of them typically associated with animal movement. Together with helping to provide a vivid picture of how a given motion took place, these verbs convey some kind of evaluation, as also noted by Slobin (2003). This is shown below:

- (2) The Uncles sat in front of the fire, took off their collars, loosened all buttons, put their large moist hands over their watch-chains, groaned a little, and slept. Mothers, aunts, and sisters *scuttled to and fro*, bearing tureens. (Recollection. From Dylan Thomas' *A Prospect of the Sea*, 1986)

This passage describes the after-dinner doings of some people after a Christmas lunch, portrayed in a different way depending on whether they concern men's or women's actions. Thus, whereas those of the former are rendered in fairly neutral terms, women are described as *scuttling to and fro*, which suggests the quick, endless motion of mice or any such small creature. The choice of verb *scuttle* and the contrast of this term with those used in the description of the men's actions is, in this sense, highly evaluative.

Another interesting set of verbs comprises *cycle*, *launch*, *land*, *skid*, *skate*, *swerve* or *spin*, most of which bring to mind vehicles, some of them related to sports. Their occurrence in the corpus may be explained in different ways. In the first place, many such verbs occur in the anecdote set within the corpus. In this sense, they reflect some of the texts' topics, that is, the typical comings and goings of people of a certain age (and, hence, actions like rollerskating, cycling and the like). The verbs also help authors economize words: by describing a given motion event as *screeching to a halt* we may infer that the people involved were driving a vehicle at high speed. At the same time, some verbs point to the influence of certain domains of experience in the development of the English lexicon. Thus, given the pervasiveness of vehicles in our society, it is not surprising to find that human motion is, indeed, described by means of vehicle-related verbs regardless of whether the motion thus portrayed actually involves the use of any such vehicle or artifact. For instance, although the verb *skid* is usually associated with cars or skates, in the sentence *I didn't notice the chipolata sausage I'd dropped until I trod on it, skidded and smacked my head on the fridge door!* the verb *skidded* does not imply the use of any such vehicle – the typical sense of the term being thus extended to refer to human sliding motion.

*Skid* could well be included in the type of motion verbs referred to in Levin (1993: 264-65) as "roll verbs", and described as related to manners of motion characteristic of

inanimate entities and where the displacements denoted by the verbs are not controlled by the protagonist. Interestingly, the instances where such verbs are used to describe human motion always appear in the narrative climax of the anecdotes, which suggests that this use – or ‘alternation’ in Levin’s sense – may also be rhetorically determined. This is also the case of verbs that suggest the violent, colliding or sudden quality of the motion event thus referred to (e.g. *pop*, *nip*, *crash*, *flip*, *knock* or *slam*). Indeed, it may be argued that the rich information and graphic potential of many of the verbs used in this way is both a response to and an indicator of all the different aspects underlying certain narrative genres. The evaluation issue briefly outlined here is addressed in the ensuing section.

### 3.2. The purpose(s) of genres and the use of motion verbs

The authors’ choice of verb in the narratives of the corpus cannot be explained solely by alluding to the topic or participant/register aspects determining the various genres represented. Rather, it appears to respond to whether the texts’ purpose is to inform, describe or, simply, entertain – that is to say, to the genres’ goal(s). The rhetorical possibilities *and* constraints of motion expressions in English are again best illustrated by anecdotes from teenager magazines. These are usually published in a distinct section under such suggestive titles as ‘Desk Dodgers’ and ‘Show off Cringes’ (*Bliss*), ‘Traumarama’ (*Seventeen*), ‘How Embarrassing’ (*Sugar*) or ‘Prom Screams’ (*Cosmogirl*), to list some of the repertoire offered in the magazines’ anecdote section. The expectations set by such titles with regard to the nature of the anecdotes are fully met by the texts. Moreover, the frequently negative quality of the topics covered in them may also underlie the frequent use of verbs with a negative and/or evaluative bias discussed earlier. For the more embarrassing and/or funny the story, the higher the chance of getting it published and, of course, of being judged the best anecdote in the section. Motion is important, but manner is paramount because it is precisely *how* something happened that is the source of embarrassment, humor, etc. in these narratives. Of course, given the small size of the texts, motion patterns barely amount to more than two or three instances. However, regardless of this relatively small number, the constructions are very effective for setting the tone of the narrative and, most importantly, for describing the events in them in a vivid, graphic manner. By way of illustration, consider the following two anecdotes from the corpus:

- (3) [M]y Mum wouldn’t let me quit [ballet classes] and every year I had to take part in this stupid dance recital in the town hall. Last year I was so fed up that I ‘accidentally’ *pirouetted into the scenery and dragged it down on top of all of the other dancers*. It made the local newspaper, and got me kicked out of the dance school. Result!
- (4) I thought I’d play a prank on my mate one night when I was staying at her place. ... I put my sleeping bag over my head, zipped it up, and *waddled out into the hallway*. I couldn’t see a thing, but ... I ran at my friend yelling: “I’m a big snake, raaaaahhhh!”

The climax in both anecdotes comes with the portrayal of how these two girls entered and exited from the places in their stories. Thus, if we substituted *pirouetted*

into the scenery in (3) for neutral motion verbs like *enter* or *get* the anecdote would be substantially deprived of the main source of its protagonist's embarrassment (and, hence, the readers' amusement). Likewise, the verb *waddle* in (4) is prototypically predicated of ducks, yet here describes the somewhat unconventional and laughable exit of the author of the anecdote. In this sense, we may contend that the verbs' role is to help readers imagine or 'see' the whole scene and then laugh at the ludicrous events recounted in them. The colorful quality of such verbs and, in many cases, their evaluative bias is, in this sense, justified. Moreover, the use of verbs like *waddle* or *lunge* involves a first evaluation by the author of the events in the anecdote, whose recreation in written form via such verbs will influence the way her readers will read the text and react to it.

Furthermore, as pointed out in the vast discussion on storytelling, it is not only believability but durability that makes a good story. This is nicely summarized in Bhaya Nair (2003), where the main function of narrative is seen as:

mak[ing] some parts of a communicative loop or chain ... both potentially detachable and iterable. A 'good story' is one that can be 'taken away' by listeners and/or tellers and repeated in other conversations, other contexts, other cultures. ... The structure of narrative appears beautifully adapted to time-transfer, to taking away, to having and holding in some kind of formal permanence. (Bhaya Nair 2003: 5)

Of course, should we have to choose between the accurate telling of events and a more expressive, vivid performance so that our stories can be 'taken away' the latter would undoubtedly come first (consider, for instance, the weight of manner-concerned language for enjoying and remembering jokes). In this light, the higher percentage of manner verbs in anecdotes is far from surprising: they focus on *how* the events in them took place because this is what makes them tellable in the first place, and in so doing, the narratives become worth reading and, presumably, memorable or durable (see also Slobin 2003 in this respect). Likewise, literary folk/fairy tales are characterized by the graphic potential of some of the verbs used for describing their characters' tribulations, even if, in this case, the weight of verbs concerned with telling *what* happened is heavier than that of those devoted to describing how this took place in most cases.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, the non-literary folk stories and recollections in the corpus appear to be more sober, even if still highly dynamic. The motion verbs in them are used to provide information about the comings and goings of the people in them (the *what*), rather than making audiences imagine *how* those took place. A possible explanation may lie in the texts' topics which, in turn, may well be related to the kind of experience shared by narrators and narratees. The following has been extracted from a recollection of a hunting day:

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<sup>4</sup> Although the vividness of many such stories via the verbs in them should not be underestimated, the high percentage of graphic verbs in extremely short texts such as anecdotes is outstanding, and suggests that their use is a useful device to foreground manner at the expense of any other aspect of the anecdote.

- (5) I had a bad time one fall when I *went up the river there*. ... One morning I *was going to [my brother's] cabin* to have lunch. There was a great big rock there, so I *paddled out around it on the tide*. I looked up and I saw two caribou just above. So I *let my canoe come back down around the rock and I went ashore*, and I tied her on. ... They *started to swim across the Churchill River*. I shot near them to see if I could *drive them back to my side*. They *turned around* hard, but like a fool I had one more shot and *drove them back to the other side* again. I *let them get partway across the river*, so that when I *got to the other side* I'd be close to them. I *got over*. The gun only held three cartridges. One *got out of the water on the bank* and I killed him. I fired the next shot at the cow one. I pumped in the third cartridge, held up the gun and fired again. I didn't see another thing in the world until I saw the palm of my hand, full of blood.

This narrative explains its author's tribulations in skinning a caribou with only one hand. Of course, the topic itself (hunting) may well justify the abundance of motion events in the story: if he is to be praised for his deed, the audience needs a detailed account of the hunting scene (i.e. of what happened). Actually, the quick succession of events seems to be the main reason why this person did not notice that his gun barrel had exploded until he felt the wound in his hand. In other words, the topic asks for a rapid account of *what* happened because this is what matters, rather than a colorful portrayal of the caribou's and hunter's movements. Moreover the story is aimed at people who, presumably, go hunting themselves and, therefore, not only share similar knowledge, but surely have certain expectations concerning what a good story is or should consist of. Put another way, other considerations apart, the audience would not expect the narrator to use expressions like *The caribou rushed/popped/nipped to the other side of the river* to indicate the way in which certain actions took place. Overall, we may venture that this is a story to inform and share, rather than a story to laugh at or remember (actually, there is nothing laughable about having a wounded hand and having to manipulate game).

In this sense, anecdotes on the one hand and folk stories and recollections on the other illustrate two different ways of using motion verbs to narrate motion events. Thus, whereas anecdotes are mostly concerned with a graphic description of *how* events happened, folk stories and, above all, recollections are primarily concerned with narrating the events themselves (the *what*). Of course, narrative genres hardly ever consist of one or the other aspects but, rather, usually combine both. However, all in all the narrative focus or weight in the genres under consideration tends to suggest the said two tendencies.

Finally, the least manner-biased narratives in the corpus are historical narratives and news stories.<sup>5</sup> Although congruent with the informative goal of these genres, the relatively colorless quality of the motion verbs used in news stories is surprising,

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<sup>5</sup> The present discussion concerns only the data found in the corpus and, in this sense, may not illustrate the findings of other researchers dealing with the same topic. Thus, although Slobin (2003) points to the graphic descriptions of motion in news stories, those explored in the present research were not particularly outstanding in this respect, probably because only short news rather than features or long news stories were included in the corpus for the reasons explained earlier.

particularly if we take into account the genre's concern with detail and, hence, journalists' resourceful use of vocabulary. However, most of the lexis rhetorically exploited in news involves nouns and adjectives rather than motion verbs. This may happen for a number of reasons. First, news stories need not be particularly concerned with motion events. Second, these texts have a very short life; accordingly, the memorability and durability aspects mentioned earlier are not particularly felicitous for describing media narratives in general, except for a few stories that do happen to remain in the collective memory. Finally, media texts are characterized by their multimodal nature, that is, news items are not only verbally conveyed but also graphically illustrated. Given the impact of images, the fact that manner-of-motion verbs are not particularly relevant in many news stories (at least, the ones in the corpus here analyzed) is far from surprising.

In sum, both the quantity and quality of motion patterns in narratives appear to respond to various aspects related to the genres they illustrate. The foregoing discussion has suggested that the way motion patterns are used to convey motion events, and particularly, that the choice of verb in the expressions may well respond to the topic(s), participants, register and rhetorical goal(s) characterize the rationale of the different narrative genres incorporating the patterns. The question that remains is whether insights from this exploration may be usefully applied to FLT.

#### **4. Enriching input from genre analysis**

The main purpose of this paper has been to describe the presence and function of motion constructions in a small text corpus comprising various narrative genres. The starting premise was that the expression of motion events and, particularly, the choice of verb could respond to the topic(s), participants, register and rhetorical goal(s) characterizing the rationale of different types of narrative. This exploration was motivated by the awareness that V-language learners attempting to learn an S-language – in this case, Spanish learners of English – often find it difficult to acquire such idiosyncratic and important patterns. Studying the phenomenon as it appears in various communicative contexts was considered a necessary step before deciding upon the methodological strategies most useful for introducing this topic in the FL classroom.

This is because, as surveyed earlier, motion verbs and, particularly, those specifying manner of motion are a given for speakers of an S-language like English: from childhood, they are recurrently exposed to all sorts of input full of rich descriptions of motion events. In this sense, their conspicuously graphic verbalization (and, presumably, conceptualization) of the motion domain is the effortless product of a long process of becoming full members of the English-speaking community (see also the discussion in Gentner and Boroditsky 2001 in this respect). In contrast, EFL Spanish learners, like others whose native language belongs to the V-framed type, lack the cognitive frame and rich repository of motion verbs and, accordingly, need to become aware of how motion events are expressed in English and other S-languages. Sometimes they need to learn these verbs from scratch, particularly in the early stages of their training.

An important component in this acculturation process is, of course, the quality of the input used in the classroom. In this regard, the research here described has attempted to show that not all narrative genres are equally rich in motion verbs, and that their use is determined by discourse factors other than resource availability. Moreover, given the differences across genres with regard to topic, audience and purpose, it may well be argued that not all genres are equally suited for all learners. Thus, if motion verbs and, particularly, manner of motion verbs are to be introduced in a classroom mainly composed of young learners, fairy tales might provide a good – and, given the learners’ age and interests, particularly interesting – source of data for designing classroom activities and tasks. These may involve (a) showing students flashcards illustrating the motion events described in the stories in order to help them learn such verbs, (b) making learners match flashcards with the corresponding motion expressions in a given story, (c) making one student enact the motion denoted by the verbs found in stories read in class (following Total Physical Response techniques) and asking his/her classmates to guess the verb, or (d) tell students to make up a story in groups and perform it in front of their classmates, who will have to write it down afterwards, and *vice versa*.

If, in contrast, we are dealing with teenagers with a pre-intermediate level of English, anecdotes seem to be the best option (see the discussion in Lindstromberg and Boers 2005 in this regard). Some of the activities described earlier for younger learners may well be used with these learners (e.g. the use of flashcards to help them learn the verbs, or making them enact those verbs and guess their meaning), as well as structural exercises where students are asked to turn sentences with adverbials specifying how a given displacement took place into sentences where the specifics of motion are expressed by the main verb (e.g. *She left the room in a hurry* versus *She hurried out of the room*). However, both the age and English proficiency of these students allows for more ‘sophisticated’ activities and tasks. Thus, teachers can give students several anecdotes and ask them to underline or highlight every verb expressing motion events. After looking them up in dictionaries (bilingual and monolingual), learners may be asked to explain why they think such verbs are used in the texts. They can also substitute the verbs for ‘neutral’ or less manner-biased verbs and discuss the change provoked by this in the texts. After making students aware of the importance of manner of motion verbs in the genre, teachers may (a) give them texts previously edited (i.e. only using manner-neutral verbs) and ask the students to rewrite them in a more graphic or appropriate fashion, (b) give students texts in which verbs have been deleted and ask them to write a suitable verb (e.g. from a list provided by the teacher until they are able to think of a verb by themselves), or (c) write an anecdote using verbs chosen by the teacher in advance.

Finally, more advanced learners may be engaged in more complex tasks involving the exploration of how motion patterns are used across different narrative genres – becoming, thus, researchers of the L2. The activities may range from those aimed at less proficient learners – which may be used to make students aware of this particular lexico-grammatical resource or as warming-up activities – to tasks where learners compare the use of motion verbs in different genres. The latter may involve the use of a small corpus (like the one used in the research described in the present paper) and computing tools such as a concordancer – both fully compatible with the growing

interest and use of new technologies in Foreign Language Teaching. Since most manner of motion verbs occur with particles, students can start by searching for these in the corpus in order to explore the verbs that occur with them. These may then be discussed, classified according to the type of motion they express, etc., thus engaging students in both qualitative and quantitative research on how motion verbs are used in the genres under focus.

In short, given the importance of input in learning a second/foreign language – indeed, in learners’ acculturation to a different way of construing the world through language – an unavoidable first step is a thorough investigation of what input may be best in order to design classroom activities and procedures for the purpose of teaching a particular language topic or use. However, more research into both the impact of typological differences across languages as well as the pragmatic aspects involved in particular uses of language is still needed in order to gain insights applicable to designing FLT materials combining both dimensions.

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