

## ON THE SEMANTICS OF ENGLISH VERBS OF LOCOMOTION<sup>[\*]</sup>

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*Abstract.* The paper offers a semantico-syntactic analysis of a selected group of English verbs of locomotion, namely those that represent a borderline category between manner of motion verbs and path verbs. The analysis shows that in the verbs under investigation (a) directionality of motion does not have an additional status, (b) the sparsity of information about the manner of motion is conceptually related to the obligatory presence of a directional goal of motion and (c) the verbal semantic templates represent hierarchically ordered structures.

The present paper offers a semantic analysis of a selected group of manner of motion verbs with special regard to the meaning component ‘directionality of motion’. The verbs under investigation are those that carry explicit information about a high speed of motion, namely the verbs *dart*, *race*, *dash*, *speed*, *whisk*, *hasten*, *hurry*, *rush*, *bolt*, *scoot*, *hurtle*, *tear*, *shoot* and *zoom*.

These verbs are commonly classified among verbs that express manner of motion (cf., e.g., Levin 1993, Narasimhan 2003) because, needless to say, speed of motion is a feature that pertains to the kinetic modality of motion. Manner of motion verbs in general do not encode information about any specific direction of motion (*He ran*, *He walked*), unless they combine with an explicit directional phrase (cf., e.g., Levin 1993: 267): *He ran to the store*, *He walked to the store*. By contrast, the path verbs (*arrive*, *come*, *go*, *leave*, *enter*, *return*, *depart*, etc.) are mute about any specification of the manner in which the movement is carried out. These verbs are also called “verbs of inherently directed motion” (cf., e.g., Rosen 1984, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1992) because they include “a specification of the direction of motion, even in the absence of an overt directional complement” (Levin 1993: 264), cf. *He entered*.

Although it is known that manner of motion verbs do not form a uniform class but involve a number of sub-types (cf., e.g., Miller and Johnson-Laird 1976), they are all considered to share two meaning components, namely the presence of information about the kinetic modality of motion and the absence of information on the directionality of motion. Contrary to this view, I claim that not all members of this class behave uniformly in this respect – more specifically, that certain verbs specifying a high speed of motion are not devoid of the component ‘directionality of motion’. Consider the following examples dem-

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onstrating that the manner of motion verbs under investigation are obligatorily accompanied by phrases indicating the locational goal of motion or the path that is traversed:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) She darted into her bedroom and reappeared with a cut-glass bottle of a very expensive make. (H8J)
- (2) [...] I raced into the house, dialled the BBC [...] (H9Y)
- (3) He sped away back to the car and we could hear his urgent voice, though not the words. (ADY)
- (4) [...] she flashed the smile one more time – and then whisked away to her own cabin. (G3G)
- (5) Irina had dashed into the bathroom and was washing her hair [...] (APM)
- (6) He concluded that after the main chute had failed to open, Mr Tipping (34) either could not locate the handle for the reserve chute or possibly pulled the dummy by mistake as he hurtled towards the ground. (HJ4)
- (7) I bundled him into the car and zoomed off to the nearby University Herbarium with a whole leaf of the plant. (BMD)
- (8) He tore towards her, menace in every line of him [...] (JYC)
- (9) She shot into the bedroom like a released balloon. (CKE)
- (10) They spotted Sandison's approach and raced towards him. (ASN)

Directionality of motion does not have to be expressed solely by means of prepositional phrases employing the prepositions *to*, *into* or *towards*. Consider the following examples with the prepositions *on*, *along* and *across*:

- (11) He rushed along London Street and Bridge Road so fast that he puffed and staggered the last few yards [...] (BP1)
- (12) He hurried across to greet them, his ruddy face [...] (GVP)
- (13) They drove through Port Philip and sped on down south. (Collins Cobuild 1988: 1401)
- (14) He came out of the hole and tore across the hill faster than any creature in the world. (EWC)
- (15) They hurtled across the landing. (AEB)

The phrases with the prepositions *on*, *along* or *across* specify the path by indicating the vectorial character of the motion. It is well known that a constitutive property of a vector is its directedness. From this it follows that the reference to the vectoriality of motion indicates its directionality. This is the reason why some of the verbs from the verbal group in question can also combine with phrases that do not necessarily encode that a certain location is reached, as the above set of examples demonstrates.

At this point, a few remarks on the verbs *hurry*, *hasten*, *rush* and *speed* are in order. These verbs generally express the idea that someone performs some action quickly, e.g. *We hurried to finish our work*, *We hastened to tell him the good news*, *We needn't rush*, *He*

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis is based on examples taken mainly from the British National Corpus (the bracketed symbols after the examples refer to the text samples from which the examples are taken) or from *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* (1988).

*sped to meet her*. This means that they do not explicitly express locomotion by a human agent. However, they do so if the sentence contains an expression that encodes a locational goal of motion or the path along which the agent moves – cf. the following examples:

- (16) She sped into the half-light, aiming well to the left of the sound. (FP0)
- (17) Montgomery put down the telephone as Sergeant Bird hurried into the library on the tail of his brisk knock. (C8D)
- (18) She then hastened to the dining room, expecting [...] (HHB)
- (19) [...] we rushed to the sitting room to put on the TV. (A57)

Although Levin (1993: 105) enumerates the verbs *hasten*, *hurry* and *rush* as belonging to the manner of motion class of verbs, she is, to my mind, not correct in interpreting the verb *hurry* in the sentence *Maggie hurried through the museum* (Levin 1993: 271) as a general verb of rushing and not as a motion verb. It is clear that the prepositional phrase *through the museum* brings about (or, is a signal of) a shift in the verb's categorial meaning: the verb is used in a translocational sense here.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that some of the verbs from the verbal class under investigation clearly encode direction although they are not accompanied by any goal or path specification, cf.:

- (20) He's been warned not to try and bolt. (Collins Cobuild 1988: 149)
- (21) Since Tweed appears to have scooted, are you sending out a general alert [...] (ARK)
- (22) I'd better scoot. (Collins Cobuild 1988: 149)

We see that the verbs *bolt* and *scoot* lexicalize direction of motion even in the absence of any path or goal phrase, in spite of the fact that both the verbs belong to the manner of motion class. The reason lies in the fact that they incorporate information about the starting point of motion (*bolt* and *scoot* mean, roughly, 'leave a certain place'). It is clear, then, that the starting point of motion fulfils the same function as the locational goal of motion, i.e. that it indicates directionality (in the case of the verbs *bolt* and *scoot* even without the use of particles, i.e. without what Talmy (1985) called the verb's 'satellites'). The function of the particles to indicate directionality of motion can be illustrated in the following set of examples, in which the 'satellites' *out*, *off* and *away* indicate directionality of motion via referring to its starting point:

- (23) I started to tell you earlier, but you dashed off. (H7W)
- (24) As the young boy sped off to reassure his worried employer, the two constables walked the few hundred yards [...] (ANK)
- (25) Pete shot out with his hair standing on end like the bristles of a brush. (CDM)

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<sup>2</sup> This fact may be taken as evidence in support of the construction grammar (on this see, e.g., Goldberg 1995). In line with this theory, the presence of the directional phrase should be seen as necessitated not by the semantics of the verb, but by the semantic requirements of the given type of construction. In other words, translocational meaning of the *hurry* sub-group of verbs should be interpreted as pertaining to the specific syntactic configuration, not as a feature inherent in the verb itself.

- (26) I have never left a vehicle more quickly in my life. I flew over Paddy's shoulders, bounced off the bonnet and rushed away like a madman. (AR8)

Needless to say, the function to indicate the starting point of motion can also be fulfilled by a prepositional phrase with the preposition *from*:

- (27) Ana turned and bolted from the room. (EWH)  
 (28) Then she tore from the room. (CB5)  
 (29) Swiftly before whoever it was could ring again, Leith sped from the kitchen. But she discovered she had delayed too long [...] (K5D)

The obligatory presence of a locational goal (or the path traversed in the course of movement) attests to the fact that in the verbs under investigation, directionality of motion is not a mere potential feature. It is an obligatory component that completes the verb's meaning. This means that in these verbs, directionality of motion does not have an additional status. It arises from the core meaning of the verb itself and not compositionally, through the addition of a directional phrase. From the non-additional status of the meaning component 'directionality of motion' it follows that phrases encoding the goal or the path of motion have the status of arguments, not of adjuncts. In connection with this, let me mention Goldberg's test in the form 'no -ing occurred', which she proposed as a "useful heuristic for determining the verb's basic meaning" (cf. Goldberg 1995: 43). The unacceptability of 'no darting/tearing/dashing etc. occurred' shows that directional phrases are complements of the verb. From this it follows that directionality of motion belongs to the conceptual structure of the verbs in question and, therefore, it directly manifests itself at the syntactic level.

We have seen, then, that in the verbs under investigation manner of motion is not in complementary distribution with direction, as it is sometimes claimed (cf. Levin 1993: 252). A question may now be posed, namely which component in the semantic structures of the verbs in question is responsible for the obligatory presence of directionality of motion. First, let me recall that the verbs, apart from denoting a high speed of motion, provide very sparse information about concrete physical attributes of motion. For example, the verb *speed* may refer to a motion carried out on foot, but one may speed somewhere in a car or on a bike, *hurtle* may refer not only to walking or running but also to falling (cf. example (6)), *whisk* may refer to a movement carried out by animate beings that have no feet (snakes whisk into holes), etc. It would, therefore, be tempting to assume that the factor that is responsible for rendering the motion as directed is represented by the manner component 'a high speed of motion'. There are three reasons that might speak in favour of this assumption:

(a) High speed is a central semantic feature in the class of verbs under investigation (the term 'central semantic feature' is borrowed from Cruse 1986 – it is a feature that is common to all the lexemes belonging to a given class).

(b) In the verbs under investigation, high speed does not have a mere derived status. Let me explain the point in the example of the manner verb *run*. This verb does not carry ex-

plicit information about the presence of high speed. In Kudrnáčová (2003) I claimed that in running, high speed of motion is a secondary semantic feature because it only follows from the kinetic character of the respective motion, which also explains why the combination of *run* with *slowly* is not paradoxical. By contrast, the verbs under investigation provide sparse information about a specific kinetic modality of motion, which ensures that speed assumes a dominant position in their semantic structures – note in this connection the unacceptability of the combination of these verbs with the adverb *slowly* as in *\*He rushed slowly to the door*.<sup>3</sup>

Let me, in connection with the discussion on the functional position of the manner component ‘high speed’, point out that its dominant position is underlain by the considerable sparsity of information about other manner characteristics of the motion. From this fact it follows that the component ‘high speed’ may operate independently of other manner components. Put another way, it does not require that other manner components be present (recall that, as mentioned above, in the verbal group under investigation high speed does not have a mere derived status). It appears that the component ‘high speed’ is a manner component *sui generis*, which manifests itself also in its ability to single out the verbal class in question as a special category.

(c) High speed is, on semantico-pragmatic grounds, closely related to a locational goal, i.e. to the purpose of the movement. Therefore, it seems to be high speed that determines the obligatoriness of the component ‘directionality of motion’.

However, the decisive factor in rendering the movement as directed is not high speed but the relative sparsity of information about the kinetic modality of motion. Let me adduce two arguments in support of this assumption.

The first argument concerns the relationship between directionality and purpose of motion. It is certainly true that the two concepts are related and typically occur together. But they do not need to. For example, jogging or running need not be directed (i.e. need not be aimed at achieving a certain locational goal), and still may be carried out for some purpose (e.g., one may jog or run for exercise).<sup>4</sup>

The second argument concerns the considerable sparsity of information about a more or less precise kinetic modality of motion as manifested in the verbs in question. Let me explain the point in the example of the manner verbs *sprint* and *spurt*, which also provide unequivocal information about a high speed of motion but in which, in contrast to the verbs under investigation, the reference to manner properties other than high speed is not backgrounded to such a degree (note that *sprint* and *spurt* denote a specific type of running). This shift in the semantic weight brings about a relative backgrounding of the reference to a directional goal of motion. This is the reason why Goldberg’s test yields a more or less acceptable result: ‘No sprinting/spurting occurred’. Note also that one can say, e.g., *I*

<sup>3</sup> In spite of lexicalizing high speed, these verbs can combine with adverbs of the *quickly* type (*He rushed quickly to the door*). As Cruse (1986: 108) observed, such a combination is not pleonastic since it brings about an intensification of meaning.

<sup>4</sup> As pointed out by Taylor (1996: 29), “*jog* tends to be infelicitous not only with expressions of goal, but with directional prepositional phrases in general,” so one cannot *jog to catch the bus* or *jog after someone*.

*wasn't used to sprinting the last two miles* (but one cannot say *I wasn't used to darting the last two miles*).<sup>5</sup>

The sparsity of information about the kinetic modality of motion has an interesting ramification. The verbs in question present movement basically as a change of location, with other manner components (with the exception of speed) being pushed into the background. The obligatory presence of the meaning component 'directionality of motion' brings these verbs close to the path verbs.

It may be maintained that, owing to the obligatory presence of directionality of motion and the relative sparsity of information about the manner of motion, the verbs in question belong to the path class. It should be realized, however, that these verbs can combine with path verbs (which are, as mentioned above, devoid of any specification of the kinetic modality of motion). This shows that the two groups of verbs cannot be put on a par. Consider the following examples, in which the path verbs *come* and *go* present motion as a pure change of location and the verbs from the group under investigation specify the manner (high speed) in which the displacement is carried out:

- (30) He and Mr Taylor came tearing down the yard to see what was up. (CDM)
- (31) As Guy sat contemplating this conclusion, a fair-haired child came racing around the corner of the north tower. (HH1)
- (32) The Lorrimores, followed by everyone still in the dining room, went dashing off into the dome car, but Emil and I [...] (BP9)
- (33) She glanced back just as she was about to turn a corner, and saw Joe as he came hurtling out of the side-exit. (GW0)
- (34) [...] until finally whatever had been holding him released its grasp and he came shooting to the surface, only to begin falling sluggishly back again as a dead weight. (ADY)
- (35) The Sergeant came rushing in from next door. (ACE)
- (36) Enid Nightshade [...] came zooming over the treetops and screeched to a halt so forcefully that her cat and suitcase shot off the back and [...] (CCA)

In conclusion, let me summarize the main points. In the verbs under investigation, (a) directionality of motion does not have an additional status, (b) the sparsity of information about the manner of motion is related to the obligatory presence of a directional goal of motion, and (c) the verbal semantic templates are hierarchically structured, with the manner component 'high speed' assuming a dominant position.

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say, however, that the verbs *sprint* and *spurt* cannot occur in contexts in which a locational goal of motion is specified (*He sprinted to his car*, *The runner spurted for the line*), because high speed is, as mentioned above, closely related to the purpose of the motion.

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