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Travelling in Space: Spatial Representation in English and Italian Tourism Discourse

1. *Introduction*

Over the last decade, scholars have debated whether tourism discourse should be rightfully introduced among the other types of specialized discourse (Calvi 2000, 2003; Edwards and Curado 2003; Nigro 2006; Gotti 2006; Fusari 2009) without reaching unanimous consent. Much of the debate has revolved around the textual and linguistic features of guidebooks, widely recognised as one of the most representative genres (Castello 2002; Fodde and Denti 2005; Vestito 2005, 2006; Nigro 2006; Cappelli 2006; Francesconi 2007).

One of the most controversial aspects is that, contrary to what happens in other instances of specialized discourse, the vocabulary of guidebooks (and of other popular tourist genres) lacks some of the typical features of specialized lexis (e.g. monoreferentiality, lack of connotational meaning, transparency, etc., see Gotti 2003). For some scholars, this is enough to exclude the possibility that the language of tourism may be a type of specialized discourse in its own right.

This study tackles the question of whether the vocabulary of guidebooks should be definitively dismissed as an example of specialized lexis by reason of its semantic accessibility to the "general public", or whether it is rather the case that words taken from general "everyday language" can act as accessible but functionally specialized lexical items and thus contribute to the specialization of the genre and of tourism discourse as a whole. The research is grounded in a cognitive pragmatic approach to specialized discourse and lexical meaning, both

seen as complex dynamic systems emerging from the pressures of cognitive, linguistic and contextual factors.

2. *A pragmatically oriented approach to specialized discourse*

The concept of specialization itself is not straightforward. Calvi (2000) and Gotti (2006) underline how specialization is not a uniform phenomenon: it comes in "degrees" which vary according to several parameters such as the type of "knowledge" shared by the participants in the communicative event (e.g. expert to expert communication; expert to non-expert communication, etc.).

In a strongly pragmatic approach to LSP (see Merlini Barbaresi 1989; Cappelli, Franceschi and Lorenzetti *forthcoming*), the distinction between general and specialized language can be seen "in terms of relation between the language system and the 'special' uses that can be made of it in communication" (Merlini Barbaresi 1989: 83), so that "all linguistic realizations" can be "seen as functionally and situationally specific" (Merlini Barbaresi 1989: 83). Accordingly, the language used in guidebooks could be seen as an example of "functionally specialized language" used in interactions between specialists (the expert-writer) and non-specialists (the non-expert-reader) and, for this reason, guidebooks can make for a good test bench to investigate the linguistic features which somehow characterize tourism discourse and contribute to its definition as a specialized domain.

The underlying idea is that, by serving the main purpose of this genre, some highly accessible lexical items may be used in a "functionally specialized way" and contribute to the overall specialization of this type of discourse. More specifically, the present study focuses on verbs used for spatial representation and description and on whether the way in which they are

construed may essentially become distinctive of the genre by reason of its frequency and of its function.

The choice of such a specific semantic domain follows from the hypothesis that verbs of motion and location may have a prominent role in the "special" use made of the linguistic system in guidebooks by reason of their function in tourist communication. Through language, guidebooks guide the tourist in his or her real or imaginary journey through "a set of different scenes, of landscapes or townscapes which are out of the ordinary" (Urry 2002: 1). In other words, guidebooks have a "leading function" (Dann 1996) and contribute to build, develop and lead the "tourist gaze" (Urry 2002) by guiding the "tourist glances" (Urry 2001) both at the pre- and on-trip stages of the tourist experience. Therefore, despite being semantically accessible to non-experts and experts alike, verbs used for spatial representation might be carefully selected in order to reach the intended goal for which this type of discourse is meant, that is to guide and shape the tourist gaze while "firing imagination" (Dann 1996; Cappelli 2006).

3. *The data*

The study relies on data gathered from two small corpora of English and Italian guidebooks (a parallel and a comparable one)[1]. The corpus comprises parallel texts from the "Florence" and "Central Tuscany" sections in two guidebooks originally written in English, namely the Lonely Planet Guide (*Tuscany and Umbria*) and the Rough Guide (*Tuscany and Umbria*) and their Italian translations. It also includes comparable data from the "Florence" section of the Michelin guidebooks *Plan Discover Explore: Tuscany 2006* and *La Guida Verde Toscana*

[1] Elicited data obtained from two sets of drawing description tasks performed by mother-tongue English and Italian informants will only be briefly discussed in Section 6.

2004, which were written for the two markets by independent authors who follow a common layout. The parallel corpus is composed of approximately 270,000 running words in English and 265,000 words in Italian; the comparable corpus is composed of 45,600 words in English and 40,170 words in Italian. All the verbs used in descriptions of the location and movement of inanimate entities in the English corpus were retrieved, classified and paralleled with their Italian translation or, in the case of the comparable corpus, with the verbs that occurred in the descriptions of the same places or scenes.

4. *Spatial representation in English guidebooks*

In the English parallel corpus, 1664 tokens of 125 verb types were retrieved that are used to describe the location of inanimate objects in space. The first part of the study involved the classification of the individual verb tokens according to the spatial information that they lexicalize. The verbs retrieved were grouped into several categories according to whether they encode motion or location and were further classified according to the additional information that they lexicalise relative to the object, such as its axial orientation, its position, its shape, etc. Since, as it is usually the case, most of the verbs retrieved lexicalize a complex interplay of different types of information often pertaining to different conceptual domains, for practical reasons, and with the awareness of the oversimplification presupposed by such an operation, the verbs were classified according to Landau and Jackendoff's (1993) proposal: verbs of state were taken to be representable as *be* + preposition and verbs of motion were taken to be representable as *go* + preposition.

4.1 "*Be* + preposition" verbs

As could be expected, of the 1664 total tokens retrieved in the parallel corpus, 1348 belong to the "*be* + preposition category"

and only 316 belong to the "*go* + preposition category". The "*be* + preposition category" is mostly made up of verbs of general location followed by spatial prepositions, which are therefore the most frequent lexical means for spatial representation of inanimate objects in the English guidebooks. Expressions lexicalizing "existential placing", i.e. the "neutral" linguistic representation of the existence of an object in space (e.g. *to be located, to be situated, to be found, to be placed*), are the most frequent in terms of spatial representation strategy. Interestingly, the verb *to be* used in the existential constructions *there is/are* or followed or preceded by spatial expressions (e.g. adverbials, prepositional phrases) accounts for 16% of the total occurrences analysed and is therefore the most frequent means for describing the location of objects in guidebooks.

The other type of verbs which were included in the "*be* + preposition category" are verbs of "spatial placing", that is, verbs which, without being too specific, contribute some additional information about the orientation of the object they refer to and/or about the region in which it is located (*to stand, to lie, to contain, to crown, to dominate,* etc.). This second group is much more varied and includes verbs that lexicalize information relative to the position in which different objects are located in space with respect to each other or to the observer. Some examples include verbs lexicalizing references to the vertical axis such as *to overlook, to support, to top, to crown, to dominate,* and *to shelter*[2]:

1. […] a clock tower **overlooking** a picturesque little square [...]
2. […] medieval buildings **perched** above the valley floor […]

[2] It is probably worth stressing again that this classification represents an oversimplification. The information lexicalized by verbs such as *to shelter* or *to dominate* is obviously not limited to the disposition of objects along a vertical axis but includes also reference to difference in size, the relationship to the surrounding objects, to the shape of the objects in the scene, etc. A thorough discussion of the individual verbs and of their lexical complexity is beyond the scope of this study.

Other verbs lexicalize general inclusion (e.g. *to comprise, to surround, to contain*), or relational inclusion (e.g. *to join*, *to link*), sometimes also encoding information about the nature of the background (i.e. bidimensional vs. tridimensional) or of the inclusion (i.e. perimetral vs. generic; complete enclosure vs. partial enclosure, etc.):

3. The vast church […] now **encloses** little more than a stone altar.

Some verbs lexicalize location with respect to an object, such as lateral location (e.g. *to adjoin*, *to parallel*, *to flank*) and frontal location (e.g. *to front*, *to back onto*):

4. […] the route **is lined** with caves […]
5. San Bartolomeo **fronts** one of the nicest contrada squares.

Finally, other verbs lexicalize the distribution of objects on a surface. This is the case of verbs such as *to cover*, *to dot* and *to riddle*:

6. […] hillsides, **dotted** with sheep […]

The semantic classification of the verb tokens included in the "*be* + preposition" category was not always easy. There are some problematic cases which are difficult to classify as verbs of location because they seem to include some sort of "dynamicity". This is the case of verbs like *to squeeze* or *to give way*, which are certainly used to describe location but which also seem to involve some sort of active participation of the objects themselves and create a more dynamic effect in the description in which they are included:

7. [...] smallish rooms **squeezed** into an old medieval tower
8. The houses **give way** to gardens as they near the ramparts.

4.2 "*Go* + preposition" verbs

The verbs included in this category are verbs that lexicalize motion. However, as it will be discussed in section 4.3, in the majority of the occurrences they are used to provide information about the location or configuration of objects in space. The 316 verb tokens classified as "*go* + preposition" verbs can be further subdivided into various groups. Some verbs lexicalize motion on a surface or through a surface or an enclosed space. This is the case of verbs such as *to sweep, to spread, to traverse, to cross* and *to enter*:

9. […] the main thoroughfare **sweeping** away in front of you […]

Other verbs lexicalize motion on a circular or curved path (e.g. *to encircle, to curve, to wind*, etc.) or make reference to motion on a path by specifying its point of origin or its end (e.g. *to start, to end, to reach*, etc.):

10. A circle of towns **rings** its lower slopes […]
11. […] **curling** from north to southwest […]
12. Roads up to Montalcino […] **wind** through bucolic swathes of vineyard […]
13. Before the next lunette **comes** a fine marble bas-relief […]

Finally, the majority of these verbs lexicalize motion either on a horizontal or on a vertical path, as in *to branch, to flow, to radiate, to go, to run, to pass, to stretch, to follow, to emerge, to rise,* and *to drop,* to mention but a few:

14. Its route **passed** below Siena's walls.
15. […] views that […] **stretch** to Siena […]
16. […] a cart-track **rises** through vineyards […]

4.3 Comment

The analysis of the data retrieved from the English sample of the parallel corpus shows that a vast portion of the occurrences of the verbs analysed represent instances of fictive motion (Talmy 2000). In other words, in the scenes described, there are no elements that physically change place or actually move, but in order to provide a good spatial representation of specific objects, they are described as moving or "doing" something.

Approximately 63% of the occurrences investigated are cases of fictive motion, i.e. cases in which an entity is depicted as moving even though it is in fact completely static in the real world. Motion does not actually take place but is subjectively construed in the interpretation of the reader. For this reason, fictive motion is not just created by motion verbs used to describe static objects: some of the "*be* + preposition" verbs, especially those used in combination with spatial prepositions or which involve an element of dynamism and were indicated above as the "problematic cases", can also create the perception of motion (see examples 7 and 8 above).

The classification of the types of fictive motion identified in the data shows that the majority of the cases are instances of "coverage path fictive motion" (47%), that is, cases of fictive motion in which objects are "conceptualized as having a leading edge that is in virtual motion, or as being scanned along its length by one's focus of attention" (Talmy 1983: 236). 8% of these cases are instances of "coextension path". Other occurrences are cases of "access path" fictive motion (12%), that is, "a depiction of a stationary object's location in terms of a path that some other entity might follow to the point of encounter with the entity" (Talmy 1999: 242) and of "advent path" (33%), that is, "a depiction of stationary object's location in terms of its arrival or manifestation at the site it occupies" (Talmy 1999: 241), mostly of the type "site manifestation" (28%). A few cases can be classified as "emanation" (8%) ("the fictive motion of something intangible emerging from a source",

Talmy 1999: 216) of various types: orientation path, radiation, and sensory paths.

The vast majority of the examples of factive and fictive motion in the corpus lexicalize motion events with respect to the experiencer's line of sight and take the latter as the source. Hence objects that move away from or towards, up or down, around or in a non-linear way, in the majority of the occurrences, especially the ones retrieved in the most evocative passages, do so with respect to the reader-experiencer.

5. A feature of English, of the guidebook genre or of the discourse type?

The data in the English corpus seem to show a preference for dynamicity in the descriptions found in guidebooks. The next question addressed was then whether this is a general tendency in English regardless of the textual genre in which descriptive passages are included or whether it is a feature of the language of guidebooks as a specific genre and, if so, whether this high percentage of fictivity in the encoding of spatial information is a sign of some sort of functional specialization.

Research in the linguistic expression of spatial information has shown interesting typological differences across languages, which are reflected in language processing. Slobin (1996a) has pointed out that speakers of different languages tend to focus on different aspects when describing space in general and motion in particular. In his "thinking for speaking" theory, he claims that English speakers, when faced with the task of describing a visual scene, tend to favour dynamic aspects and to specify which elements move from one point to the other, often adding information about the manner of motion. This hypothesis is in line with Talmy's (1983) typological distinction of languages into "satellite-framed languages" and "verb-framed languages" depending on the type of information which is conflated in a single lexical form (i.e. motion, path, or manner of motion).

"Satellite-framed languages" are languages that tend to conflate in the verb information about motion and manner of motion and resort to prepositional phrases to add information about the path. "Verb-framed languages", on the other hand, are languages that conflate the verb motion and path, whereas manner is usually expressed through adverbials. English is a "satellite-framed language" and, according to Slobin (1996), English speakers use many manner of motion verbs and tend to describe complex paths in a single sentence through "clause-compacting", that is by specifying different segments of a path by using a series of prepositional phrases in a single verb phrase as in (17):

17. I saw the car **go out of** a tunnel, **down** a steep hill and **into** a new tunnel.

The frequent use of fictive motion seems therefore to be compatible with these considerations of the characteristics of the English language as far as the expression of spatial information is concerned. To test this hypothesis, the Italian translation of the guidebooks was investigated. Italian, contrary to English, is a "verb-framed language" and prefers path-conflating verbs. Studies on the translation of motion events from English to another verb-framed language such as Spanish (Slobin 1996b; Rojo and Valenzuela 2003) have reported significant informational differences in translation with a loss in the number of manner of motion verbs and frequent simplification of complex paths in the Spanish translation of motion events. Therefore, if the use of fictive motion is favoured by the nature of the English language, Italian should differ considerably in that respect. Similarly to what Rojo and Valenzuela (2003) observed in the comparison between Spanish and English, in the Italian corpus there were 6% more instances of fictive motion than in the original English texts, with cases such as (18):

18. […] the old fortress **lies alongside** the Aldobrandeschi tower […]

> […] il palazzo […] **si erge** accanto alla torre degli Aldobrandeschi.

This can be explained by the fact that, in Italian, complex paths are translated with coordinated propositions, which increases the count of fictive motion verbs in the corpus sample.

19. The road **zigzags** up the hill **through** a long tunnel **to** the wooded top.
    La strada **sale a** zigzag su per la collina e, dopo **aver attraversato** una lunga galleria, **raggiunge** la cima boscosa.

Not many instances of manner of motion verbs were found in the English corpus. This could be explained by the fact that, in fictive motion events, information relative to the manner of motion is said to be "subordinate" to information relative to the path. Matsumoto (1996) identifies two conditions for fictive motion: the "path condition" and the "manner condition". The "path condition" says that in the fictive motion event, some aspects of the path must be expressed; the "manner condition" says that if the verb lexicalizes manner of motion, the latter must be related to the overall shape of the path. It is probably for this reason that Italian translators seem to have tried to be as faithful as possible to the original text, especially by preserving information about the path, even when expressed via manner-of-motion verbs in English. In order to do this, when the two systems diverge, Italian often resorts to adjectives, adverbials and prepositions:

20. Nearby, **facing** the Porta Castellana, is a medieval washhouse […]
    Nelle vicinanze, **davanti a** Porta Castellana, c'è un lavatoio medieval […]
21. […] with **radiating** chapels […]
    […] con […] cappelle **disposte a raggiera** […]

In some cases there is loss of information or a difference in perspective. Thus, in (22) *sormontare* lexicalizes the position of the lantern in a more neutral way compared to *to crown*; in (23) part of the meaning of *squeezed* is lost in the more neutral *ricavate*; in (24) the fictive motion encoded by *sweeping away* is lost in the translation.

22. From the base of the white marble lantern that **crowns** the dome […]
    Dalla piattaforma in marmot bianco della lanterna che **sormonta** la cupola […]
23. […] smallish rooms **squeezed** into an old medieval tower
    […] camere (*piccoline*) **ricavate** in una torre medieval
24. […] the main thoroughfare **sweeping away** in front of you
    […] le principali direttrici **proprio di fronte** a voi a sinistra

All in all, the differences reported for the expression of spatial information in the two languages appear to be significantly reduced in the parallel corpus of English and Italian guidebooks. Several explanations could be envisaged. It might be the effect of the well-known translational tendency towards an overall adherence to the original text. The Italian translators might feel the need to preserve as much as possible the most relevant information lexicalized by the English verbs of motion and location, especially in the instances of fictive motion. Since the information relative to path seems to be most relevant, translators might be reluctant to omit part of this information and try to reproduce all the nuances of meaning either by resorting to the most similar lexical item available in the system (e.g. Italian manner-of-motion verbs such as *snodarsi*) or by finding other linguistic means to include it in the immediate cotext (e.g. adverbials).

Another possibility is that fictive motion is perceived as somewhat "literary" or as a stylistic feature of the writer: translators might tend to "preserve the image", sometimes to the disadvantage of naturalness in the target language. However,

fictive motion is also preserved in very "prosaic" passages, such as in directions to specific sites of interest, which might indicate that the information lexicalized by means of fictive motion verbs is regarded as particularly important in guidebooks and therefore to be rendered in the Italian translation as faithfully as possible.

In order to verify whether translational tendencies have a major role in the reduction of the differences between the English and Italian expressions of spatial information, a similar analysis was carried out on the English and Italian comparable corpus of guidebooks. The results were similar (Demi 2009). As in the parallel corpus, more instances of fictive motion events were found in the Italian sample. This could be again explained by the need to break complex paths into several propositions as discussed above and also by the fact that the original Italian text seems to resort to a larger array of verbs in contexts in which English chooses the verb *to be*, some of which create fictive motion (cf. *to be*, vs. *erigersi, innalzarsi*). However, the disparity in the number of occurrences of fictive motion events seems even more interesting if one considers the fact that the original Italian text displays a wider range of strategies to encode spatial information than the Italian translation. First of all, impersonal forms are very common (e.g. *si entra, si trova, si incontra*), which reduces the need to resort to an inanimate subject, hence the opportunities to use fictive motion expressions. Moreover, scenes which in the English guidebook are described by means of verbs of motion and location, in the Italian guidebook, are frequently described by means of verbs belonging to different semantic domains. Thus, in the original Italian text we find verbs of vision or "vision-related" verbs (e.g. *notare*, *riconoscere*, *ammirare*, *vedere*, *sbirciare*, *rappresentare*, *raffigurare*, *spiccare*, *stagliarsi*) and experiential verbs (e.g. *ritrovarsi*), which put the experiencer to the centre of the scene in a more explicit way (Demi 2009):

25. The room **opens into** a tiny studio.
    Da questa sala si può **sbirciare** nello scrittoio.

26. The remaining section of the corridor **opens into** the Boboli Garden.
Ci si ritrova nel giardino di Boboli.

The widespread use of verbs of motion and location in fictive motion constructions does not seem, therefore, to be a peculiarity of the English language. It seems rather to be a common feature of guidebooks as a genre.

The frequency of fictive motion events in both the Italian guidebook and in the Italian translation seems to exclude the possibility that this phenomenon is the sole result of translational tendencies. Italian translators, however, seem to want to preserve the information lexicalized in occurrences of fictive motion in the English text as much as possible, even though Italian would have a wide array of different strategies to describe the location of objects in space. As a consequence, some of the forms found in the translated text are rare or altogether absent in the original Italian text. This points towards the conclusion that the information conveyed through these expressions is regarded as especially important. The next question is whether such importance is attributed to fictive motion events in any descriptive passage or whether they have a special role in guidebooks.

6. Elicitation tasks

The elicited data will hopefully help answer that question. Several studies have resorted to elicitation tasks from drawings (Slobin 1996b; Rojo and Valenzuela 2003), but, whereas the elicitation of factive motion expressions is relatively simple, eliciting fictive motion can be more difficult because the stimulus must be designed so as to encourage the informant to describe the objects in a static scene as in imaginary motion. In other words, the stimuli must prompt informants “to perform a

particular 'visual scanning' of concrete elements of a scene" (Rojo and Valenzuela 2003: 135).

For the purpose of the present study, 20 English native speakers and 20 Italian native speakers were presented with two elicitation tasks that involved an "active" informant who described an image and a "passive" informant who either had to draw the image described or to look at it while it was being described[3]. The aim of the elicitation tasks was to collect data so as to verify whether the frequent use of fictive motion is a feature of spatial descriptions in general or whether it is distinctive of descriptive passages in guidebooks and to investigate the role of "shared perception" in the description process, that is, the effect of the mutual knowledge on the part of the informants that they are both looking at the same scene and that they are therefore in a position of immediately identifying and positioning objects in the space at issue.

In the elicited data analyzed up to now (random samples of 2000 words each), fictive motion does not seem to be as common as in guidebooks, probably because oral texts are usually more informal than written text, or because of the personal preferences of the informants. It seems equally frequent in the Italian and in the English data elicited with the task that excludes "shared perception". Quite interestingly, though, in the English samples especially, fictive motion events are quite rare in the data elicited with the "shared perception" task which requires both the "active" and the "passive" informant to look at the image at the same time.

7. Conclusive observations

The investigation of the parallel and of the comparable corpora has shown that, even though English and Italian differ

[3] The collection of the empirical data and their analysis are still underway, therefore any observation is necessarily partial and provisional.

typologically in terms of the lexicalization of spatial information, the use of verbs of motion and location in fictive motion events is comparable in the two languages. The high frequency observed in descriptive passages in English guidebooks, therefore, cannot be attributed to the nature of the language but it is more likely a feature of the textual genre.

The overall adherence of the Italian translators to the information lexicalized in the fictive motion events in the texts included in the parallel corpus, both in terms of manner and path of motion, has been interpreted as an indication that such information is regarded as highly relevant and to be preserved. A tentative analysis of the first data resulting from elicitation tasks appears to indicate that in more informal descriptions the fictive motion construal of verbs of motion and location is greatly reduced. Moreover, it almost disappears in descriptions in which the participants share some knowledge of the scene or perceptual stimuli.

These observations assume a special relevance if we think of the function of fictive motion in relation to the function of descriptive passages in guidebooks. Fictive motion expressions lexicalize the reader's mental displacement. They are "a prompt for the computation of a "mental path", an invitation for the hearer to scan sequentially the length of a given object in a certain direction" (Rojo and Valenzuela 2003: 127). The reader-experiencer is ideally brought to the centre of the scene[4]: the imaginary movement happens with respect to his line of sight.

Research in the field of the cognitive sciences and cognitive linguistics has shown that, far from being simply a literary device, the use of fictive motion has interesting effects on language processing and holds a prominent role in the theories of embodiment in cognition and knowledge representation (Wallentin et al. 2005, Matlock 2004, Richardson and Matlock 2007). Fictive motion expressions are claimed to prompt mental simulation: they activate the left posterior middle temporal

[4] It is interesting that Italian more explicitly resorts to perception verbs.

region responsible for the processing of complex action knowledge (Wallentin et al. 2005).

According to Wallentin et al.'s (2005) research, the hearer[5] applies motion to the scenario depicted by scanning it egocentrically. In other words, when subjects hear fictive motion expressions, they simulate motion in their minds (Matlock 2004). This does not simply create a mental image: it actually affects the way in which they look at the scene described (e.g. it affects the subject's eye movements by evoking mental representations of motions – see Richardson and Matlock 2007).

The hypothesis advanced at the beginning of this work that verbs of motion and location may be used in a "functionally specialized way" seem to find support in the data discussed in the present work as well as in suggestions from cognitive linguistic research and in the sociological contributions to tourism studies supporting the linguistically-grounded view of guidebooks' "leading function" (Dann, 1996, Margarito 2000). Verbs of movement and location seem to be used in a functionally specialized way to reproduce in an (experientially) iconic manner the path that the eyes of the tourist-child (Dann 1996) are supposed to follow. In other words, with their lexical choices, specialist-writers guide their non-specialist readers through their tourist experience so that they become part of the scene described. In choosing the most suitable verb, capable of conveying both spatial and emotional information at the same time, the writer fires the readers' imagination by creating in their mind an almost cinematic image and contributes to building the (global) tourist gaze (Urry 2001). In this sense, despite the fact that the lexical items discussed in this work are not characterized by the typical features of specialized lexis, they seem to display a certain level of functional specialization that suits the special purpose of guidebooks as one the most representative genres of tourism discourse.

[5] The experiments were conducted with auditory stimuli.

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