

**THE COMPREHENSION OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE BY
AFRIKAANS-SPEAKING CHILDREN WITH AND
WITHOUT SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT AND BY
CHILD SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKERS OF
AFRIKAANS**

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the degree of Masters of Arts in General Linguistics at the
University of Stellenbosch

The crest of the University of Stellenbosch is centered behind the text. It features a shield with various symbols, topped with a crown and surrounded by a decorative wreath. The motto 'VERITAS LIBERABIT VOS' is visible at the bottom of the crest.

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March 2008

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Summary

Children experiencing language disorders have often been noted to have difficulty in comprehending figurative language, to a greater or lesser degree. The present study examined and compared the comprehension of figurative language, namely idioms and similes, in three groups of boys between the ages of 8 and 10. These three groups included (i) typically developing Afrikaans first language speakers, (ii) typically developing Afrikaans second language speakers (L2) and (iii) Afrikaans first language speakers with specific language impairment (SLI). A total of 18 participants were studied. The participants were interviewed individually and tests were conducted verbally. 25 idioms and 25 similes obtained from *Die Afrikaanse Semantiese Taalevaluering* (AST) were used. No contexts were provided for the idioms initially, but if the participant produced an incorrect or literal answer for the idiom, the idiom was placed in context. The use of context proved to be beneficial to all groups. Similes were read to the participant, who had to provide the final word as a response. The similes proved easier for all groups to comprehend, possibly due to their greater explicitness. The data were analysed statistically, but due to the small sample size, the participants were also examined individually as case studies, which provided further insight into the results obtained and revealed the non-homogeneity within the SLI group. The performance of the SLI group proved to be slightly inferior to that of the other two groups, but no statistically significant differences were found among the three groups. The L2 participants were asked to translate the idioms and similes into English. It was found that the Afrikaans idioms and similes were seldom likened to their English equivalents. Idioms which were semantically and syntactically similar or identical to the Afrikaans sentences often incited literal interpretations. Incorrect phonological transfers also appeared to create confusion and to obscure meaning. The L2 speakers' difficulties possibly arose from (i) a lack of familiarity with figurative language, (ii) an inability to grasp figurative language, and/or (iii) a lack of proficiency in Afrikaans. Pedagogical implications and recommendations are discussed, and comments are made regarding future research on this topic.

Opsomming

Kinders met taalversteurings blyk dikwels ook tot 'n minder of meerdere mate probleme te hê met die begrip van figuurlike taal. Hierdie studie ondersoek en vergelyk die begrip van figuurlike taal, naamlik idiome en vergelykings, in drie groepe seuns tussen die ouderdomme van 8 en 10 jaar. Hierdie drie groepe sluit in (i) tipies-ontwikkelende Afrikaans eerstetaalsprekers, (ii) tipies ontwikkelende Afrikaans tweedetaalsprekers, en (iii) Afrikaans eertetaalsprekers met spesifieke taalgestremdheid (STG). 'n Totaal van 18 deelnemers is bestudeer. Onderhoude is individueel met elke deelnemer gevoer en toetse is verbaal uitgevoer. 25 idiome van *Die Afrikaanse Semantiese Taalevaluering* (AST) is gebruik. Aanvanklik is geen konteks gegee nie, maar indien die deelnemer 'n verkeerde of letterlike antwoord vir 'n idioom gegee het, is die idioom in konteks geplaas. Die gebruik van konteks het in alle groepe 'n positiewe effek gehad. Vergelykings is aan deelnemers gelees, waar hulle as respons die laaste woord moes verskaf. Die vergelykings was vir alle groepe makliker vir begrip, moontlik weens hulle hoër vlak van eksplisiteit. Die data is statisties geanaliseer, maar weens die klein aantal deelnemers is elkeen ook individueel as 'n gevallestudie ondersoek, wat verdere insigte in die resultate gelewer het, en die nie-homogeniteit van die STG groep aangedui het. Die prestasie van die deelnemers met STG was effens onder dié van die ander twee groepe, maar geen statisties-beduidende verskille is onder die drie groepe gevind nie. Die tweedetaal-deelnemers is gevra om die idiome en vergelykings in Engels te vertaal. Daar is gevind dat die Afrikaanse idiome en vergelykings selde aan hulle Engelse ekwivalente gekoppel is. Letterlike interpretasies is dikwels gegee vir idiome wat sintakties en semanties eenders is as die Afrikaanse sin. Verkeerde fonologiese oordragte het ook verwarring veroorsaak en betekenis verduister. Die probleme van die tweedetaal-deelnemers is moontlik as gevolg van (i) onvoldoende vertrouwdheid met figuurlike taal, (ii) onvermoë om figuurlike taal te interpreteer, en/of (iii) onvoldoende vaardigheid in Afrikaans. Pedagogiese implikasies en aanbevelings word bespreek, en kommentaar word gelewer oor verdere ondersoek op hierdie gebied.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Figurative language comprehension, production and the accurate/ appropriate replication thereof cohering to a given context have come to play an important aspect researchers and speech-language therapist measure when assessing the language competence of both typically developing and language-impaired children (Kerbel and Grunwell 1998). In the present study, the comprehension of figurative language of three groups of children is compared: typically developing Afrikaans-speaking ones, Afrikaans-speaking ones with specific language impairment (SLI), and typically developing English-speaking ones with Afrikaans as a second language (L2).

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2, the literature review, presents an overview of theories proposed on the comprehension of figurative language processing in both adults and children. It establishes what the prerequisites are for early development of figurative language understanding and where special populations are deficient or assumed to be deficient in these abilities. This chapter includes findings of and methodologies employed in previous studies. The hypotheses for this particular study are set out at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3, the methodology and data collection chapter, discusses the design of the study at hand. It stipulates what the selection criteria were in order for a child to take part in this study. Additional information on the diagnoses of the children with SLI is provided. Chapter 3 also discusses the experimental tasks used for testing, how they were administered and how the data were scored.

Chapter 4, the results and discussion chapter, provides the raw scores obtained by the participants on both the idioms and similes tests. The results are presented in bar graphs and, where applicable, anomalies are discussed. Statistical analyses are also provided.

Chapter 5 specifically examines the performance of the L2 speakers. It includes a discussion of the bilingual child and typological similarities between the languages dealt with in this study. The opacity and transparency of the idioms as experienced across all

three groups are examined. It addresses previous studies which saw value in the classification of idioms, both in terms of linguistic and conceptual similarities. Similar categories were laid out for analyzing the data produced by the L2 speakers.

Chapter 6 provides a discussion of pedagogical implications and recommendations, limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The comprehension of figurative language incorporates several domains of general language comprehension, language use, and semantics. These domains (i) relate to the pragmatics of language, such as speaker intention;¹ (ii) reflect a child's world knowledge and the application thereof; and (iii) require the ability to make inferences in processing semantic and contextual information by decoding implications (Gordon 1961; Hoffman and Honeck 1980:7; Mednick 1962). Apart from evaluating matters pertaining to language ability and pragmatics, figurative language creates an opportunity to assess and develop imagery, imagination, and creativity within a child (Gordon 1961; Hoffman and Honeck 1980:7).

2.2. Idioms and similes as subtypes of figurative language

This study looked at children's comprehension of idioms and similes as forms of figurative language. Idioms and similes are often the first two categories of figurative expressions a child comes into contact with and learns (Malgady 1977:1734). Idioms are defined as familiar, fixed expressions where meaning is not dependent on the literal interpretation of the individual words (Zempleni, Haverkort, Renken, and Stowe 2007:1). It has been proposed that familiar idioms are stored in the mental lexicon and then retrieved much like individual non-figurative words are (Ackerman 1982). In light of this proposal, Burbules, Schraw, and Trathen (1989:93) argue that idioms entail the retrieval of a specific and conventional meaning and, therefore, are not in truth figurative at all.²

¹ It is proposed that the accurate interpretation of context potentially reveals a child to have developed theory of mind (ToM), as speaker intention must be known in order to interpret figurative language (Gibbs 1987:569-570). ToM is defined as the ability to attribute independent states of beliefs and desires to others and to distinguish them from one's own. Typically developing children are said to display this ability at approximately 4 years of age (Baron-Cohen, Tager-Flusberg and Cohen 2000). ToM in relation to figurative language is a debated issue, both in terms of (i) whether it is an essential requirement for figurative language processing, and if so, what type of figurative language, such as sarcasm or metaphor, and (ii) whether figurative language tests suffice as suitable material to evaluate or assume the presence of ToM (Blom and German 2000; Nobury 2004). This study did not administer any false-belief tests to the participants (see Baron-Cohen 1985 for a discussion of false-belief tests). Therefore, no comments will be provided in the discussion concerning the participants on this particular issue.

² This argument will not be discussed here, as it is not relevant to the present study, seeing that most of the idioms used in this study were, in fact, novel to the children.

Idioms have a variety of functions, such as admonishment, sarcasm, humour, praise, and euphemism and are therefore ideal for assessing the pragmatics involved in interpreting context (Nippold 1991:100). According to Nippold (1991:100), idioms are diverse in their etymological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties. Their etymological origins are often related to happenings of a very practical nature, even though most of these practices are often outdated. The meanings once applied to literal scenarios have over time been transposed into non-literal concepts (Nippold 1991:100). Similes on the other hand are far easier to comprehend. The studies of Reynolds and Ortony (1980) and Seidenberg and Bernstein's (1986) studies for example found similes were more easily comprehended as opposed to other forms of figurative language due to their greater linguistic explicitness and obvious referential domains.

2.3. Syntactic uniqueness of idioms, semantic analyzability, and word categorization

Semantic analyzability has proved to be of importance for both adults and children in idiom comprehension, and takes precedence over the syntactic form of the expression (Cacciari and Glucksberg 1991; Gibbs 1991:614; Gibbs and Nayak 1991; Gibbs, Nayak, and Cutting 1989; Wasow, Sag, and Nunberg 1983 as cited by Everaert, Van der Linden, Schenk, and Schreuder 1998). What does make idioms syntactically unique is that they are fixed expressions and are thus not open to syntactic flexibility. For example, unlike *She kicked the ball*, which can be paraphrased as *The ball was kicked by her*, *She kicked the bucket* cannot be rephrased as *The bucket was kicked by her* (Gibbs, Nayak and Cutting 1989).

Gibbs (1991:613) states that the comprehension of idioms largely has to do with the child's intuitions and internal semantics of the expression, as well as how "decomposable" the idiom is. The term "decomposable" refers to how transparent or opaque an idiom is deemed to be based on the components which contribute to its overall figurative meaning. In other terms, "decomposable" refers to the extent to which an idiom can be "broken down", with varying degrees of difficulty. Because idioms rank on a scale of complexity, Gibbs (1991) proposes three categories, namely "normally decomposable", "abnormally decomposable," and "nondecomposable" into which idioms can be classified (Gibbs 1991:613). Idioms which are transparent are those idioms

which are easy to comprehend without context. These are referred to as “normally decomposable” (Gibbs 1991:613). An example of such an idiom is *a tough pill to swallow*. This idiom is closely related to an unpleasant literal experience, and the mental image is sufficient to convey the idea that someone is struggling to accept something (Abkarian, Jones and West 1992). Idioms which need more analyzing, where obvious correlations are not evident without context, are referred to as “abnormally decomposable”.

There are then those idioms which are semantically “nondecomposable”, where the words reveal very little from which to draw a figurative analogy. An example of such an idiom is *Kick the bucket*. The mere phrase in no way denotes death. Nondecomposable idioms are the most abstract of idioms (Gibbs 1991:614; Swinney and Cutler 1979:523). There are, of course, no clear procedures for specifying whether – or rather to what degree – idioms are semantically decomposable.³

Young children do not have a well-developed ability to identify figurative language for what it is and, therefore, do not have inhibitions for literal language interpretations. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the role of literal meanings in the interpretation of the abstract, as it is necessary for the transfer of knowledge (Gibbs 1984:278; 2001; Nippold and Taylor 1995, 2002; Vosniadou 1987:870). Without the literal acting as a frame of reference, the figurative cannot exist. Reference to the literal in the case of children and L2 speakers is an apt means to employ in the teaching of figurative language (Charteris-Black 2002).

A child’s ability to categorize words is viewed as an indication of metaphorical competence (Billow, 1981; Gardner, Winner, Bechhofer, and Wolf 1987). However, some believe that child metaphors are merely mistakes, errors of categorization, or literal comparisons (e.g., Chukovsky 1968; Matter and Davis 1975 as cited in Vosniadou 1987:871). Vosniadou (1987:871) states that these disagreements are based on inconsistent views of (i) the nature of metaphor, (ii) young children’s classification abilities, and (iii) the criteria denoted for defining metaphor.

³ The idioms used in previous studies on children’s comprehension of figurative language were often rated by adults according to how transparent or opaque these idioms were thought to be (Levorato and Cacciari 1991; Nippold 1991). The idioms used in this study were also rated by adults (specifically, by two school teachers – see chapter 5 section 5.5 table 5.3).

2.4. Figurative language comprehension in adults

Various theories have been proposed on the comprehension processes pertaining to figurative language in both adults and children. These theories combine and aim to explain the linguistic, cognitive, and pragmatic interactions which occur during figurative language processing.⁴ As an introduction to these theories, a number of theories proposed concerning the processing of figurative language in adults will be addressed and then contrasted with those theories addressing the processing of figurative language in children, as there are similarities and differences to be accounted for.

The standard pragmatic model proposed by Grice describes the use of figurative language as a breaching of conversational norms; these norms are quality, quantity, manner and relation (Grice 1975:45-46). When deviating from these norms, different, more complex processing is warranted. The initial response to the utterance is a literal interpretation, which is then dismissed once assessed as implausible in relation to the context and is replaced with a non-literal interpretation.

More recently, two views on the processing of figurative language have emerged with regards to adult processing, namely the direct-access view (Gibbs 1994; 2002) and the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997; 2002). The direct-access view explains the processing of figurative language which is familiar to the individual and is processed easily without external cues. "Familiar" refers to conventional, common expressions such as idioms and proverbs known to the individual. Here it is thought that the individual processes this in much the same way as non-figurative language would be processed (Gibbs 1994, 2002).

The graded salience hypothesis emphasises the importance of salient meanings in figurative language processing (Gibbs 2001:325) On the graded salience hypothesis, the process of interpreting figurative language begins at a point which is context-free, and

⁴The locus of metaphor in the brain is yet to be determined. Linguists and psychologists have proposed various theories in the mind/brain's computational process of comprehending figurative language. There is, however, enough evidence supporting the notion that the right hemisphere of the brain is largely responsible for the processing of figurative language (Burgess and Chiarello 1996; Titone 1998; Jung-Beeman 2005). Although language processing is associated with the left brain hemisphere, it is proposed that the right brain hemisphere is involved in linguistic reinterpretation and inferencing (Brownell, Potter, Bihle and Gardner 1986; Zaidel 1979).

individuals interpret what is semantically most salient to them. From this point, individuals then apply this interpretation – an interpretation derived from semantic saliency – to the context, and the most likely meaning is then chosen. The context acts as a guide in the meaning selection process. Ultimately, what the graded salience hypothesis proposes is that context is secondary to semantic selection. Context merely reduces possible meanings. The graded salience hypothesis could possibly account for the amount of time taken for comprehension, as saliency is all-encompassing and the familiarity of words varies according to the individual (Gibbs 2001:319).

Other noteworthy theories include the career of metaphor theory and the constraint satisfaction model. Bowdle and Gentner (2005) propose the career of metaphor theory, which aims to clarify whether figurative language is understood directly or indirectly. This theory concerns the metaphorical mappings or links between concepts from different domains of knowledge. Words are recognized or associated with the same semantic field or experiential gestalt (Gibbs 1991:614). The theory states that comprehension is achieved by either comparison or categorization. Novel metaphors are achieved by comparisons to knowledge domains, whereas conventional metaphors are generally categorized and retrieved. The career of metaphor theory has received support from several empirical studies, as reported by Gibbs (2001:324).

The constraint satisfaction model proposed by Katz and Ferretti (2001) highlights how different aspects of linguistic information, such as syntax, lexical or conceptual information, compete for dominance or activation in parallel over the same period of time. The most salient and plausible approach is then taken (Gibbs 2001:322). There is concern that, for some proposed theories, it is unclear as to what kinds of empirical tests and data can falsify them. The constraint satisfaction model is considered to be one such theory (Gibbs 2001:323).

2.5. Figurative language processing in typically developing children

Theories which address figurative language processing in children are largely similar to those mentioned above, but are understandably simplified based on the chief differences brought about by developmental maturity, both cognitive and linguistic (Vance and Wells 1994:27). The main findings applicable to children and the comprehension of figurative

language as opposed to adults are (i) an amplified need for and reliance on context, (ii) a lack of ontological knowledge, awareness, and general life experiences, (iii) a tendency for literal interpretations, and (iv) a superior ability for the comprehension of figurative language as opposed to the production thereof (Gibbs 1987, 1991; Levorato and Cacciari 1992, 1995; Nippold and Martin 1989; Vosniadou 1987).

The two most salient processing strategies developing minds have at their disposal are interpretation of context and semantic analysis (Cain, Oakhill, Barnes and Byrant 2001:857). Thus idiom comprehension involves both top-down, contextual processing and bottom-up cognitive, semantic processing (Nippold, Moran and Schwarz 2001 as cited by Norbury 2004). Levorato and Cacciari (1999) studied idiom comprehension in children between the ages of 7 and 9 years in order to compare these two processing strategies. They concluded that younger children were more reliant on context to achieve the meaning of novel words, whereas the older children were more able to use a process of semantic analysis. Older children also benefited from context, whereas semantic analysis in younger children led to more literal interpretations.

2.6. Cognitive development and figurative language comprehension

The literature on figurative language suggests a strong relationship between a child's cognitive abilities and comprehension of figurative language. This is largely based on Piaget's cognitive stages of thought development (Piaget 1926 and 1928). Between the ages of 7 and 12 years, a child develops an extensive range of transformational skills which create a broader understanding and larger capacity to engage with reality and expand their ontological knowledge. This stage of cognitive growth also allows the child to begin to engage with abstract thinking and, thus, to begin to inhibit literal interpretations by recognizing possible interpretations a situation may present (Douglas and Peel 1979:116).

Douglas and Peel (1979:116) confirm this gradual cognitive development in reporting that children between the ages of 3 and 7 were found to be unable to override literal interpretations but, as from the age of 8 years, the children seemed to display the onset of an ability to interpret words as having dual meanings. The 12-year-old children showed a clear ability to interpret dual function words, such as *cold* and *warm*, which

denote temperatures but also personality temperaments (Douglas and Peel 1979:116).⁵ Other studies confirming improved performance related to chronological age include Abkarian, Jones and West (1992); Levorato and Cacciari (1999); Nippold (1991).

2.7. Reading ability and figurative language comprehension

Several studies confirm a strong relationship between a child's ability to comprehend written texts and their ability to draw inferences. Children with poor reading comprehension were reported to perform more poorly at inferring information than stronger readers. Those children with stronger reading abilities also fared better at semantic analyses and produced fewer literal interpretations of figurative expressions (Cain and Oakhill 1999; Cain et al. 2001; Cain, Oakhill, and Lemmon 2005; Levorato, Nesi, and Cacciari 2004). Nippold, Moran and Schwarz (2001) examined the comprehension of idioms in typically developing preadolescents, mean age 12 years 4 months. Their findings were that idiom comprehension was dependent on familiarity, reading ability, and listening comprehension. However, Levorato and Cacciari (1992) report that frequency of exposure only plays a minor role for children who are not yet able to use contextual information, again alluding to a developmental trend and or other curial factors needed for comprehension.

2.8. Global Elaboration Model (GEM)

Levorato and Cacciari's (1995) Global Elaboration Model (GEM) focuses on the assumption that figurative language is acquired on the basis of processes underlying lexical, semantic, and cognitive developments. The main questions addressed by the GEM are, firstly, when and how a child first escapes a literal interpretation and seeks a more coherent, global interpretation and, secondly, what linguistic and cognitive abilities are needed in order to facilitate this process (Levorato and Cacciari 1999). Levorato and Cacciari suggest the following criteria as facilitators for the comprehension of figurative language: (i) an understanding of the domain being discussed and therefore the semantic domain as well; (ii) the ability to use contextual information as well as integrate

⁵ Ideally, the present study should have been carried out across all the different age groups from ages 7 to 12 for comparative purposes based on Piaget's theory. However, given the exploratory nature of the study, only three age groups were included, namely 8-, 9-, and 10-year-olds.

different sources of information; and (iii) an awareness that what is said is not always what is meant.

The GEM further suggests five developmental phases concerning children's figurative language comprehension. Phase one includes children below the age of 8, in which figurative language is interpreted literally regardless of context. Figurative language comprehension prior to the age of 6 has been reported to occur on a basic level, but this is less common (Abkarian, Jones, and West 1992:581, Colston and Kuiper 2002; Strand and Fraser 1979).

In phase two, a sensitivity for context develops. Phase two characterises children between the ages of 8 and 9.

In phase three, the child develops an awareness that meaning can be conveyed both literally or figuratively. Children in this phase also begin to grasp and are able to classify types of figurative language, such as metaphor, similes, metonymy, etc. The internal state of speakers is also taken into consideration in order to understand their intentions. This phase characterises children between the ages of 10 and 12. Children also experience an intermediate phase where there is an awareness that a literal interpretation is inappropriate, but still fail to grasp the intended figurative meaning. Demorest, Silberstein, Gardner, Winner (1983) found 8-year-olds able to recognize a discrepancy between spoken words and the context of a situation but were not able to identify speaker intention; however, the 11-year-olds were able to do so. Similar findings were encountered by Rinaldi (2000).

In phase four, the adolescent can use the conventional repertoire of figurative language. In this phase, the adolescent's ability to comprehend and to produce figurative language are now almost on par. This phase characterises adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15.

Phase five is reached when the adolescent has the competence comparable to that of an adult. They have a mature metalinguistic and metasemantic awareness (Levorato and Cacciari 1999:129-130).⁶

2.9. Comprehension of figurative language by special populations

It has been found to a greater or lesser extent that children experiencing language disorders and language-related disorders, experience difficulty with the comprehension of figurative language (Nippold 1991:100; Botting and Adams 2005; Bishop and Adams 1989; Norbury 2004). Such language disorders and language related disorders include children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)⁷ (Botting and Adams 2005; Mackay and Shaw 2004), SLI (Botting and Adams 2005; Nippold 1991; Norbury 2004), and Semantic Pragmatic Language Disorder (SPLD)⁸ (Kerbel and Grunwell 1998; Hyde-Wright and Cray 1991). The diagnosis for children with SLI, SPLD and autism vary in severity (Vance and Wells 1994; Brook and Bowler 1992). Bishop (2000 as cited by Bishop and Baird 2001) proposes that children with communicative difficulties fall along a continuum with pure SLI on one end of the spectrum and autism on the other. Although the cause of these impairments may be different, all of these groups have been noted to have at least one thing in common impeding their comprehension of figurative language, viz. their insensitivity to context (Nippold 1991:100). Other child populations of which the comprehension of figurative language has been studied include children with ADHD and deaf children.

2.9.1. Children with SLI and SPLD

One significant criterion used for the diagnosis of SLI is a marked difference between an individual's (normal) non-verbal IQ and language IQ, the latter being significantly lower than the former, and the discrepancy is not on account of any physical or mental disabilities (MaCauley 2001:114). Children with SLI also struggle with narrative construction and the use of language in reasoning; as a result, they may experience emotional, behavioural, social, and academic difficulties (Nippold 1998; MaCauley 2001; Brinton, Fujiki, and Robinson 2005).

⁶ There is, of course, no clear point in a child or adults' development when it can be said that idioms have been mastered fully (Nippold 1991:100).

⁷ This includes Aspergers syndrome.

⁸ SPLD is commonly found in children with SLI (Botting and Adams 2005; Bishop and Adams 1991).

Children with language disorders often experience semantic difficulties. This may amount to word recall difficulties or warrant a diagnosis of SPLD; the latter being the one which is of more concern when it comes to a child's ability to infer information. Children with ASD commonly experience SPLD and pragmatic language impairment (PLI), PLI being the more severe condition and the one which is more prevalent in those with ASD. In some cases, the pragmatic difficulties of children with language disorders have been thought to be on account of a lack of ToM rather than on account of a language disability per se (Botting and Adams 2005:51-52).

Children with SLI are often said to experience a degree of SPLD. Inappropriate initiation of conversation, stereotyped conversation, an inability to interpret context, and a limited capacity to establish rapport with others are aspects which should be assessed in order to ascertain whether SPLD/PLI is present in a child (Botting and Adams 2005:52). Yet, as Botting and Adams (2005:52) again point out, the lines between diagnoses are imprecise, as are measures used for testing the presence of such characteristics. However, studies involving idiom comprehension claim that few differences have been found between children with pure SLI and pure SPLD (Bishop and Adams 1992; Botting and Adams 2005:59, Nippold 1991:100, Norbury 2004; and Bishop 2000; Vance and Wells 1994).⁹

It has been established that figurative language comprehension in children incorporates three dimensions, viz. cognitive, linguistic and pragmatic; arguably these three factors are contingent on one another. In summary, the cognitive account warrants the recognition of common properties between objects under comparison. The linguistic aspect requires children to be in possession of the semantic and syntactic knowledge to communicate their understanding (Gentner 1977) and the pragmatic approach requires the child to recognize speaker intention (Demorest, Silberstein, Gardner and Winner 1983). Depending on a child's diagnosis, one of the three perspectives may best explain their deficits (Kerbel and Grunwell 1998; Vance and Wells 1994).

Vosniadou, Ortony, Reynolds and Wilson. (1984) and Vance and Wells (1994) advocate that figurative language does not pose any more of a problem for children with SLI than

⁹ In the present study, only one SLI participant had a history and a current status of SPLD. The diagnostic histories of these participants will be discussed in further detail in chapters to follow.

does literal language. They also state that, as children with SLI are assumed to be following a different developmental path – namely that of a younger child as opposed to typically developing children of their age – children with SLI are able to interpret some situations and not others and are lacking in general language skills, as is characteristic of younger children.

2.9.2. Studies comparing the comprehension of figurative language in children with SLI and SPLD to that of typically developing children

Vance and Wells (1994) in their study compared children with SLI, SPLD, and typically developing children. The children were obliged to listen to tape recordings of 10 idioms placed in context. Three drawings accompanied each item. The drawings depicted a literal, a non-literal and an incorrect interpretation. Few differences were found between the three groups. The groups, however, were matched according to receptive language ability and not chronological age.

Botting and Adams (2005) for example conducted a comparative study on 11-year-old typically developing children and 11-year-old children with communication disorders namely those with pragmatic difficulties and SLI. Typically developing 7 and 9-year-olds were also tested and served as a comparative group for those participants with communication disorders. The participants with SLI performed more poorly than both the 11 and 9-year-old typically developing groups on semantic choices, but no worse than the typically developing 7-year-olds. The results suggest that figurative language interpretation is related to language ability and that children with SLI are developing at the rate of a younger child.

2.9.3. Children with ADHD

Studies have indicated that children experiencing ADHD also display a lack of social pragmatic skills (Bishop and Baird 2001; Oram, Fine, Okamoto and Tannock 1999). Oram et al. (1999) argue that behavioural traits in children with ADHD are not necessarily due to difficulties in social understanding, but that their difficulties lie with executive dysfunctions such as lack of inhibitions. Bishop and Baird (2001) found pragmatic dysfunctions in children with ADHD comparable to those found in children with Asperger's syndrome, specifically dysfunctions concerning rapport, production of stereotyped language, inappropriate initiation of conversation, and the building of social

relationships. Bishop and Baird (2001) also acknowledge the implications of dealing with a sample group where individuals vary in degree of severity in terms of diagnoses as well as multiple diagnoses. Bishop (2000 as cited by Bishop and Baird 2001) propose that children with communicative difficulties fall along a continuum with pure SLI on one end of the spectrum and autism on the other.

Bishop and Baird (2001:809), in their study, used a checklist entitled the Children's Communication Checklist (CCC) (Bishop 1998), devised to assess pragmatic aspects of children experiencing communication difficulties. The CCC lists nine categories under which the child's communication skills are assessed. These categories are speech, syntax, inappropriate initiation, coherence, stereotyped language, use of context, rapport, social relationships, and interests. Under each category, there were several examples of typical behaviour, not all of which are negative characteristics. The descriptions of behaviour are to be rated as highly applicable, partially applicable, or not applicable to the child in question.¹⁰

2.9.4. Deaf children

Deaf children are often assumed to have problems similar to those experienced by children with language impairments concerning figurative language processing and use, as well as an insensitivity to context. However, various studies have shown deaf children to be just as capable of creative thinking and comprehending figurative language as their hearing peers (Rittenhouse and Stearns 1982; Iran-Nejad, Ortony, and Rittenhouse 1980; Ebrahim 2006). Context, as repeatedly reported in the literature, plays a pivotal role in the comprehension of figurative language across all language disabled and typically developing groups. The same conclusion was drawn in studies conducted with deaf children, who could grasp inferred or indirect meaning as long as the referential domain was clear (Rittenhouse and Sterns 1990:1). The literature on deaf children's comprehension of figurative language is largely open-ended and lacking in conclusion, according to Ebrahim (2006:154):

Additional research is needed to explore creative thinking abilities of deaf children especially over a large sample of deaf individuals. The literature review

¹⁰ No such tests were used to assess the pragmatic skills of the participants the present study. However, what is provided is a qualitative analysis of the pragmatic abilities of the participants diagnosed with ADHD. Refer to chapter 3, section 3.3.5.

had provided only a limited number of studies. There is a severe lack of updated findings regarding the nature of creative thinking abilities with regard to deaf individuals. The area of nonlinguistic creativity in deaf children, including fluency, originality, play, art, and cognitive flexibility needs more investigation to answer the question of how deaf individuals express their creativity, the role of language, and if they are similar to hearing individuals in creative expression. This information will assist educators to create more suitable assessment instruments to identify creative deaf students and design more valid programs to nurture creativity in deaf students.

Ebrahim 2006:154

2.9.5. Methodologies employed in evaluating figurative language comprehension

Making accurate comparisons between studies is difficult due to several variances between the studies. Drawing conclusions is complex as the studies on the topic at hand vary in terms of populations examined, the degree to which the cognitive and linguistic abilities are described, idioms selected, and methodologies used. For example, experimental paradigms which offer answers in a multiple choice format or which present pictures to the children, may not produce accurate results, as these require less initiative from the child, but are more ideal for children with SLI. In instances where multiple choice questions or pictorial representations are given, there is the added complication of carefully creating all incorrect answers as equally misleading and all correct answers as equally transparent (Norbury 2004). However, tests which present the child with several answers may have the advantage of presenting the child with possible answers which is more likely to cause the child to respond with a positive response (which can be incorporated into the data) as opposed to a negative response (where the child opts to not respond at all).¹¹

Memory difficulties in comprehending verbal tasks must also be taken into account as a factor which may hamper children particularly those with SLI, as it has been reported that children with SLI experience memory deficits (Montgomery 1995, 1996; Weismer, Evans and Hesketh 1999 as cited by Norbury 2004). However, as Nation, Adams, Bowyer-Crane and Snowling (1999) and Norbury (2004) point out, it is difficult to assess what memory difficulties are attributable to general memory deficits, and which to verbal memory deficits, as the two are assumed to be closely intertwined.

¹¹ It is not overlooked that the contexts provided for the idioms in the present study may too be considered as more or less conducive to the idiom itself; therefore, the idioms and their context were assessed by external parties to determine their suitability. Refer to chapter 5 section 5.3. and appendix C.

It is proposed that when assessing children with SPLD/PLI, play-based therapy or methodologies are advisable in an attempt to avoid language as the only means of communication for those with expressive language impairments. Children with autism or Asperger's Syndrome, however, may not benefit from play-based methodologies as it is found that these children are deficient in their ability to pretend play (Kerbel and Grunwell 1998: Norbury 2004).

Studies by Seidenberg and Bernstein (1986), Lee and Kamhi (1990) and Botting and Adams (2005) provide examples of the effects methodologies can have on findings and reveal the strengths and weaknesses of clinical groups. Seidenberg and Bernstein (1986) found differences between learning disabled children, including those with SLI, and non-learning disabled children ages 9 to 12 years on how they performed on given tasks. Eight paragraph-length stories were used to assess their inferential abilities. The learning disabled participants performed better on the similes test than on the metaphor test. This was assumed to be on account of the explicit nature of similes. It was also concluded that the participants with learning-disabilities were deficient in metacognitive factors such as the recognition of figurative language, the inability to use context as well as an inability to make comparisons between dissimilar domains.

Lee and Kamhi (1990) compared children ages 9 to 11 experiencing language impairments with typically developing children. The participants were administered 3 verbal tasks and one visual metaphor task. The performance of participants with language impairments was found to be inferior to that of the typically developing children on the verbal tasks but not on the visual metaphor task, understandably so as visual tasks are less linguistically demanding for children with language impairments.

Botting and Adams (2005) also reported differences between performance of clinical groups based on task differences. Two tasks were administered to children with SLI and pragmatic difficulties; one semantic task where participants had to choose words with similar meanings, and one inferential comprehension task. The participants with SLI performed more poorly on their semantic choices, and those with pragmatic difficulties were less able to infer meaning.

The findings of studies conducted on the comprehension of idioms and similes on both typically developing and communication impaired children reveal the following general trends:

- (i) Figurative language comprehension improves as a child develops cognitively, linguistically and socially.
- (ii) Those children with stronger reading abilities generally fair better than those with poorer reading abilities.
- (iii) Similes are more easily comprehended than idioms due to their metaphorical and syntactic simplicity.
- (iv) More often than not, context is not utilized as well by young children or children experiencing communication impairments as it is by typically developing children.
- (v) Severity of clinical diagnosis may determine performance.
- (vi) Methodologies may influence results according to the populations studied.

2.10. Hypotheses

This study specifically examined the comprehension of idioms and the production of similes in three groups of boys between the ages of 8 and 10 years. The participants included typically developing boys whose L1 is Afrikaans; typically developing English-speaking boys whose L2 is Afrikaans; and Afrikaans-speaking boys experiencing SLI. The children were tested on Afrikaans idioms and similes as components of figurative language. The aim of this exploratory study was to examine the differences across the three groups and to compare trends in relation to previous findings.

Regarding idioms, the hypotheses for this study were the following:

Hypothesis 1:

The children with SLI will not fare as well on the idiom test as the typically developing children of both the L1 and the L2 groups, regardless of whether idioms are tested in isolation or in context, especially considering the nature of the task which is solely verbal and does not present the participant with visual aids or possible answers to choose from.

Hypothesis 2:

The L1 speakers will fare better than the L2 speakers on the idiom test.

Hypothesis 3:

The typically developing children will be more likely to recognize incongruity between the idiomatic expressions and the context, particularly the older children and/ or those with stronger reading abilities.

Hypothesis 4:

As was the case in previous studies, it is anticipated that, for all groups, general competence should increase with age. Yet, as the age range is not particularly wide, clear differences may not be noticeable. Therefore, it is expected that reading ability will possibly be the surer indicator of performance.

Hypothesis 5:

It is predicted that the SLI group will provide more literal answers for the idioms test.

Hypothesis 6:

It is predicted (as has been confirmed by studies) that context will play an important role in comprehension, but may prove to be of less assistance to the participants with SLI.

The hypotheses took into account as guidelines the descriptions of abilities provided by the GEM. The L1 typically developing participants of this study were expected to display the characteristics denoted to children befitting phase two and three during which a sensitivity for context develops; a discrepancy between spoken words and context is acknowledged and speaker intention is recognized.

Regarding the similes test, the following hypothesis was made:

Hypothesis 7:

It is predicted that the children with SLI will fare much the same as the two typically developing groups due to the explicitness of similes. It is expected here that there will be little difference between the three groups as far as plausible answers are concerned. "Plausible answers" are those answers in which the logic behind the answers will be

evident. It is expected, though, that the L1 speakers – including the SLI group, as they are after all L1 speakers – may provide more correct answers than the L2 speakers, meaning that they would supply the correct word befitting the fixed expression.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1. Design of the study

In this study, the comprehension of figurative language by three groups of 8 to 10-year-old boys was assessed and compared. The three groups of participants were matched according to their age (in years and months), their school grade (where possible), and their Afrikaans reading mark. The data were analyzed statistically, but due to the small sample size, individuals were also treated as case studies, which entailed that the results of some of the participants are discussed individually.

Children of minimum 8 years were selected because, due to the widely documented late language development of children with SLI, it was assumed that these children would have been at an added disadvantage in their younger years, where the differences between children with and without SLI would be more pronounced. As it is proposed that by age 12, children are expected to have a near adult-like comprehension of figurative language compared with their younger peers, it was furthermore decided that participants should not be older than 10, to ensure that all participants would still be in some developmental phase¹² as far as the comprehension of figurative language is concerned. For this reason, only children between the ages of 8 and 10 years were examined in this study.

In some schools, the teaching of idioms forms part of the Grade 4 curriculum. In order to control for the amount of exposure participants had had to figurative language as used in the classroom, participants were matched according to school grade.

Participants were further matched according to their Afrikaans reading mark as assessed by the class teacher. This was done because the literature indicates a strong correlation between figurative language comprehension and reading ability (Cain and Oakhill 1999; Cain et. al. 2001; Cain, Oakhill, and Lemmon 2004; Levorato et. al. 2004).

¹² Refer to GEM, section 2.8.

3.2. Participant selection

Children experiencing SLI were selected first, as these children comprise a smaller population of the children in this age group as opposed to the larger number of children available in the two typically developing groups. Each SLI child was matched in terms of age, grade and reading mark with an Afrikaans L1 speaker and an Afrikaans L2 speaker. Two schools in the northern suburbs of Cape Town which offer support for learners with special educational needs, such as those with specific learning difficulties and/or epilepsy, were approached. The speech-language therapists at these schools were requested to identify from their case-load all 8 to 10 year-olds experiencing SLI. Letters were sent to the parents/guardians of these children, via the speech-language therapists. The letters contained information regarding the purpose and procedure of the study, consent forms, and a questionnaire requesting additional information on the child. The forms and questionnaires had to be completed by the parents and returned to the schools.

Parents who gave consent were required to complete a questionnaire on their child's early development, including questions on the child's developmental milestones. They were also requested to supply a brief history of their child's general health and to state whether their child had experienced or was experiencing any chronic conditions such as epilepsy, cerebral palsy, brain injury, or physical, mental or hearing disabilities. This information was requested to control for possible influencing variables. No child who experienced or had experienced any of the conditions listed above was considered for inclusion in the study. Parents were also asked to indicate what languages are spoken in the home environment, how many siblings the child has and their ages. Furthermore, the parents were asked to indicate how often, on average, the child reads alone or is read to and whether they find it an enjoyable experience or not.

Five children with SLI were identified by the speech-language therapist in school A and four of the five consent forms were returned. All four of the participants' parents gave consent. Six children with SLI were identified in school B. Four forms were returned and three gave consent. Of the total of seven children, only one child was a girl. Initially, she was tested after having tested the three boys from school A, and it was evident that there was a marked difference between her performance and the performance of the

three boys. Quite apart from her better performance, it was decided to exclude her from the study in order to control for gender as a variable, as the majority of the potential participants with SLI available for this study were boys. It has been reported that boys are more susceptible to SLI than girls (Tomblin 1996 as cited by MaCauley 2001:114). This may explain why, out of a group of seven children with SLI, there was only one female. All six boys were included as participants.

Hereafter, five mainstream dual medium primary schools were approached in order to obtain the typically developing participants for the study. In total, approximately 110 letters were at different stages distributed to the five primary schools. Some letters were also distributed through private contacts. Approximately 70 of the 110 letters were returned, with approximately 10 withholding consent.¹³ However, several of the returned letters proved to be unsuitable matches for the participants in the SLI group. These typically developing children were either the wrong age or gender, and some were not apt matches due to their reading marks. The teachers and therapists identifying suitable participants were furnished with the criteria to apply prior to handing out the letters. However, there proved to be some misunderstandings, and letters were also handed out to learners who did not meet the required, stipulated criteria. When letters were returned and proved to be unsuccessful matches, new batches of letters were distributed. The entire process of attaining suitable typically developing Afrikaans and English-speaking participants took a total of three months, which included the periods of waiting in between for letters to be returned.

The parents of suitable candidates for the study were contacted individually to schedule appointments with their children. Appointments had to be made with the parents, as the tests took place after school hours, so as to not disrupt classroom activities. Some parents could not be reached, and replacement participants for their children had to be found. Replacements also had to be found for those who cancelled appointments and for those who were unable to meet after school hours.

A total of 24 children were administered the tests, even though this study only required 18 participants. The other six children were not entirely appropriate matches according

¹³ Of all the participants only one, participant 9BENG, was obtained through a private contact. He too attended a mainstream, dual-medium primary school.

to their age, grade or reading mark. Yet, at the time, there was a concern that there would be shortage of fully suited participants. Therefore, these children were temporarily included until more suitable matches could be found.

The participants were compared firstly in three groups of six, classified as those participants with SLI (the SLI group), those typically developing participants who were L1 speakers of Afrikaans (the AFR group), and those typically developing participants who were L2 speakers of Afrikaans (the ENG group). Participants were also compared in six groups of three, consisting of one participant from each of the three groups mentioned above; here, the members of each of the six groups were those matched in terms of exact age, school grade, and Afrikaans reading mark.

3.3. Participants

Table 3.1 presents the information of the participants classified in their three groups. The codes provided in the first column of the table are those by which the participants will be referred to throughout the study. The first three letters stand for their language ability/mother tongue: SLI – specific language impairment;¹⁴ AFR – Afrikaans speaking (L1) and ENG – English speaking (with Afrikaans as L2). The numbers following the three letters indicate the age of the participant, and the letters A,B,C differentiate between the participants where there is more than one participant of that age group.

¹⁴ All SLI participants had Afrikaans as their mother tongue.

Table 3.1. Information on participants, ordered according to their language

Parti- pant code	Age	Grade	Reading level Afr.	Reading Level Eng.	Mother Tongue	Type of school
SLI8A	8:4	2	3	NA	AFR	School for learn. dis.
SLI9A	9:3	3	2+	NA	AFR	School for learn. dis.
SLI9B	9:6	2	2+	NA	AFR	School for learn. dis.
SLI9C	9:9	3	2	NA	AFR	School for learn. dis.
SLI10A	10:1	4	3	NA	AFR	School for learn. dis.
SLI10B	10:2	3	2	NA	AFR	School for learn. dis.
AFR8A	8:3	2	3	NA	AFR	Dual medium-AFR class
AFR9A	9:4	3	2+	NA	AFR	Dual medium-AFR class
AFR9B	9:5	2	2+	NA	AFR	Dual medium-AFR class
AFR9C	9:9	3	2	NA	AFR	Dual medium-AFR class
AFR10A	10:2	4	3	NA	AFR	Dual medium-AFR class
AFR10B	10:3	4	2	NA	AFR	Dual medium-AFR class
ENG8A	8:3	2	3	3	Eng	Dual medium-ENG class
ENG9A	9:3	3	2+	3	ENG	Dual medium-ENG class
ENG9B	9:3	3	2+	2+	Eng	Dual medium-ENG class
ENG9C	9:9	3	2	3	ENG & German	Dual medium-ENG class
ENG10A	10:3	4	3	3	Eng	Dual medium-ENG class
ENG10B	10:4	4	2	3	Eng	Dual medium-ENG class

Table 3.2 categorizes the participants into six groups of three, as matched according to their age, grade and reading mark.

Table 3.2. Information on participants, ordered in terms of groups based on age, school grade and Afrikaans reading mark

Name	Age	Grade	AFR RM
8 years			
8ASLI	8:4	2	3
8AAFR	8:4	2	3
8AENG	8:3	2	3
9 years A			
9ASLI	9:3	3	2+
9AAFR	9:4	3	2+
9AENG	9:3	3	2+
9years B			
9BSLI	9:6	2	2+
9BAFR	9:5	2	2+
9BENG	9:6	3	2+
9 years C			
9CSLI	9:9	3	2
9CAFR	9:9	3	2
9CENG	9:9	3	2
10 years A			
10ASLI	10:1	4	3
10AAFR	10:2	4	3
10AENG	10:3	4	3
10 years B			
10BSLI	10:2	3	2
10BAFR	10:3	4	2
10BENG	10:4	4	2

3.3.1. Age

Participants in the SLI, AFR, and ENG groups were matched as closely as possible in terms of their age, school grade, and reading mark. Exact matches proved to be difficult to attain. An allowance was made for a three month leeway either side of the age of the

SLI child. However, in no instance in this study was there a difference of more than two months between matches.

3.3.2. School grade

In some instances, precise matching for age and grade also proved to be difficult. There were two irregularities concerning the matching of grades. These two cases are participant 9BENG, who should ideally be in Grade 2 and not Grade 3, and participant 10BSLI who should ideally be in Grade 4 and not Grade 3. Between Grades 2 and 3, the participant is still in what the department of education stipulates as the foundation phase (which comprises grades 1 to 3). The syllabi of Grades 2 and 3 do not formally incorporate idioms and similes. However, it may be suggested that participant 9BENG is at a disadvantage at any rate, even though he is in a higher grade, seeing that he is an L2 speaker of Afrikaans. It would have been less wise to match an L1 speaker in a higher grade with a participant in a lower grade as, theoretically speaking, one would assume the L1 speaker to be at an added advantage. Participant 10BSLI should have been in Grade 4 but was repeating Grade 3. Suitable typically developing participants in mainstream schools were not available in this category, which required the child to be 10 years old in Grade 3. It should however be noted that 10BSLI and his counterparts had undergone the same number of schooling years and, although his counterparts had completed the foundation phase, they had only entered into the intermediate phase (Grades 4 to 6) six months prior to testing, and had received no formal tuition on idioms and/or similes.

3.3.3. Reading mark

As stated before, the participants were matched according to their reading abilities, as it has been shown that there is a strong correlation between figurative language comprehension and reading ability. The general criteria under which reading is assessed in schools are word recognition, fluency when reading, and comprehension of texts.¹⁵ The South African outcomes based education (OBE) schooling system rates a learner's reading ability on a scale of 1 to 4, with each number representing a percentage range. The rating system is as follows:

¹⁵ This information was attained from two sources, namely teachers teaching foundation grades as well as teachers teaching intermediate grades.

1	1% - 34%	Not achieved
2	35% - 49%	Partially achieved
3	50% - 69%	Satisfactory
4	70% - 100%	Outstanding

Fewer responses were received from those parents whose children had poorer reading scores than from those parents whose children had higher reading scores. Studies have reported a link between a child's home environment and reading performance, the correlation being that, in general, the parent's/guardian's attitudes towards literacy are adopted by their children and may influence their child's academic performance (Chaney 1992, 1994, 1998; Hardman 1998; Heath 1983). It would appear as though a similar scenario is reflected by the responses to the questionnaires of this study.

3.3.4. Other characteristics

Participants 9ASLI, 9CSLI and 10BSLI were diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder). It is unknown to what extent these participants had been medicated for their ADHD. No measures were carried out to assess ADHD in this study, and it is therefore not possible, based on the results of this study, to say to what extent their ADHD may have contributed to their performance. However, theoretically, these participants are hampered by a diagnosis of ADHD over and above that of SLI, potentially impairing their inferential abilities even further. None of the typically developing participants were reported to have attention deficit disorder or ADHD.

In terms of sentence constructions and pronunciation, all participants with SLI were intelligible. When compared to the other five participants with SLI, participant 9ASLI did not display overtly noticeable characteristics of SLI listed in the CCC (Bishop and Baird 2001), nor did any of the typically developing participants. Participant 9CSLI did at times display noticeable characteristics listed under specified criteria of the CCC, namely a lack of coherency (not related to language structure), inappropriate initiation of conversation, and frequent misinterpretation of context. 10BSLI's main pragmatic difficulties, following the criteria of pragmatic difficulties stipulated in the CCC, were the use of stereotyped language and an inability to use context.

3.3.5. Information on specific participants

Interviews were conducted with the relevant speech-language therapists to obtain more detailed background histories of the participants with SLI. Interview topics included diagnosis, the year in which it was made, assessments done, treatments covered by the speech-language therapist/s and/or remedial teacher/s, as well as the progress the child had made from the onset of speech-language therapy until the date when the research was conducted. Bishop and Baird (2001) advocate that additional qualitative information from parents and professionals in studies where communication disabilities are assessed, enhance the validity of the results. Discrepancies may be found between teacher and parental descriptions and ratings of a child's communicative abilities (Bishop and Baird 2001). These discrepancies are often related to the task or situation at hand being either an artificially created situation, such as a classroom setting, or behaviour occurring in a natural setting (Bishop and Baird 2001; Vance and Wells 1994). Discrepancies highlight the importance of obtaining information from both teachers and parents, and may also reveal advantages or disadvantages of the task administered. In the present study, however, no significant discrepancies were noted between teacher and parental reports.

The information gathered on the participants with SLI during the interviews is discussed below. This information clearly illustrates the non-homogeneity of the SLI group and highlights their main areas of difficulty, with diagnoses ranging from impairments in terms of structural language ability to deficits affecting social rapport. In chapter 4, the details of these participants concerning their main areas of difficulty will be discussed in relation to their performance on the tests, where deemed applicable.

Participants 8SLI, 9BSLI and 9CSLI all attend the same school for learners with special needs. Participant 8SLI was diagnosed in 2004 as a late language developer with a general language delay. Diagnosis took place approximately three years prior to participation in the present study, aged 5 in Grade R (reception year). There is almost no discrepancy between his verbal and non-verbal IQ. This participant underwent group speech-language therapy and at no stage did he receive individual speech-language therapy.

Participant 9BSLI was also diagnosed in 2004 as a late language developer with a general language delay. Diagnosis took place approximately three and a half years prior to participation in the present study, at age 5 or 6 in Grade 1. As was the case for participant 8SLI, his verbal and non-verbal IQ scores are very similar, and he has never received individual speech-language therapy, only group speech-language therapy.

Participant 9CSLI was diagnosed with SLI and ADHD in 2004, approximately three years prior to participation in the present study, age 5 or 6 in Grade R. At the time of the study, he was still experiencing auditory perception problems and was unable to discriminate between phonemes. There were no major differences between his verbal and non-verbal IQ scores. This participant received individual speech-language therapy initially and then group speech-language therapy. He was still attending group speech-language therapy at the time of participation in the present study.

Participants 9ASLI, 10ASLI and 10BSLI all attended the same school. Participant 9ASLI was diagnosed in 2005 with SLI and ADHD, approximately two and a half years prior to participation in the present study, age 6 in Grade 1. He initially attended a mainstream school, but was identified as experiencing difficulties with language and referred to a special needs school. At the time of participation in the present study, he still experienced difficulty with reasoning, supplying definitions, sentence structure, and tenses. His language delay/disabilities were also thought (by his speech-language therapist) to be hampered by exposure to both English and Afrikaans during early childhood. He was not exposed to the two languages simultaneously but rather separately at different stages of early childhood. There was a large discrepancy between his verbal and non-verbal IQ. This participant received individual speech-language therapy initially and then group speech-language therapy. He was still attending group speech-language therapy at the time of participation in the present study.

Participant 10ASLI was diagnosed with SLI and SPLD in 2002, approximately four and a half years prior to participation in the present study, when he was 5 years of age and in Grade R. His receptive language ability is superior to his expressive language ability. This participant also has difficulties with syntax, word categorization and associations; word finding abilities; problems relating to context; and auditory perception problems. The difference between his verbal and non-verbal IQ is the largest discrepancy of all the

participants. However, his non-verbal IQ is of above average and he has a strong aptitude for maths. This participant received individual speech-language therapy initially and then started group speech-language therapy. He was still attending group speech-language therapy at the time of participation in the present study.

Participant 10BSLI was diagnosed with SLI and ADHD in 2002, approximately four and a half years prior to participation in the present study. In 2002, the participant was in Grade R, age 5. He was said to have difficulties with categorizing words and associations, particularly relating to context. He also had difficulties with sentence structures and tenses. He is undergoing group speech-language therapy where dealing with abstract thinking and reasoning exercises. The difference between his verbal and non-verbal IQ is pronounced. He was repeating Grade 4 at the time of participation in the present study. Participant 10BSLI received individual speech-language therapy initially and then group speech-language therapy, which continued at the time of participation in the present study.

All SLI participants were said to have made good progress in the language abilities over the years. As far as the typically developing participants are concerned, there is only one case worth mentioning in terms of participants who deviated from the stipulated selection criteria for this study. This participant is 9CENG who has English and German as his home languages. Initially, it was thought that he should not participate in this study; however, due to a shortage of available participants in his category and his unexpected superior performance in the tests, it was decided to include him in the study. What made participant 9CENG's superior performance unexpected was the fact that he has a below average Afrikaans reading mark. A possible reason for his superior performance is that he may have benefited from his knowledge of German and or English in the tests (seeing that all three languages, including Afrikaans, have Germanic roots – Gooskens and Heeringa 2004:3). Those idiomatic phrases and contexts in Afrikaans which had phonological, syntactic and/or conceptual similarities to German and/or English were identified, in an attempt to ascertain whether this was indeed the reason for his good performance. This will be discussed further in chapter 5, section 5.4.

3.4. Experimental tasks

Two tests were administered to the participants in Afrikaans; one on idioms and another on similes. These tests were adapted from the *Afrikaanse semantiese taalevaluerings medium* (AST; Pretorius 1989), which was compiled to test children at foundation and intermediate school level on various aspects of Afrikaans grammar and general language skills.

The AST was compiled in 1989 to serve as a standardized language assessment medium for Afrikaans. Prior to this, no other standardized language assessments were available to schools to gauge a child's Afrikaans language ability. The AST aims to assist teachers and speech therapists by providing a compilation of tests suited to a quantitative and qualitative assessment of a child's language abilities comparable to a norm-based sample. Through this, educators are also able to identify possible language delay, which enables them to provide suitable intervention where needed (Pretorius 1989:7).

The AST provides a written introduction briefing the administrator as to the aims, purpose and manner in which the tests should be carried out. Apart from assessing the use of grammatical forms, the AST was also designed to assess and address the perceptual and conceptual development of the child in relation to semantics, and to ascertain a child's ability to recognize abstract relations between words within sentences (Pretorius 1989:1-3). The AST consists of 17 sections, ranging from vocabulary tests and tests of grammar to the more abstract components of language such as humour, idioms, and similes (Pretorius 1989:9). Idioms, metaphors, and proverbs are classified under one category in the AST. Although idioms, similes, and proverbs all have a definition of their own, they are all essentially metaphoric in nature, particularly in instances where the individual is unfamiliar with expressions, as stated in chapter 1 (Gibbs, Bogdanovich, Sykes, and Barr 1997:141).

Those sections of the AST testing abstract concepts assess the extent to which the child can discern between multiple meanings words may hold (Pretorius 1989:22). The AST also states that it can be used to assist in the evaluation of English-speaking children who have Afrikaans as a L2 (Pretorius 1989:9).

Seidenberg and Bernstein (1986 as cited in Pretorius 1989) state that, in order to grasp figurative language, there must be certain prerequisites in place; namely a concrete understanding of definitions and the ability to comprehend abstract concepts. Words need to be correctly categorized and classified in terms of semantics and grammar before the individual is able to make a sound judgment and choose an applicable meaning from a range of possible answers pertinent to the context (Lund and Duchan 1983 as cited in Pretorius 1989).

The AST lists 25 idioms ranging in difficulty. It notes that of the two subsections (idioms and similes) idioms are more difficult and more abstract, as similes are explicit in their comparisons (Pretorius 1989:22). In the AST, idioms are not placed in context. Testing the children purely on the idiomatic phrases, as the AST does, seemed a futile exercise for purposes of this study, as it would more often than not only be testing the child's knowledge of the idiomatic formulae themselves – without requiring more in-depth, abstract thinking, inciting the child to draw inferences from the contexts provided. For this reason, the AST's idioms were first tested out of context and, if a child could not accurately relay the meaning of the idiom, the idiom was presented in context. This enabled the researcher to obtain more conclusive results on the role of context in idiom comprehension, use and competence. For example an idiom such as *aan iemand se lippe te hang* was first read to the participant. If they were unable to provide a correct answer, the idiom was placed in context, for example; *die juffrou lees 'n baie opwindende storie vir die kinders en hulle hang aan haar lippe*. Refer to appendix A for the list of idioms used in this study, in their order of verbal presentation.

Twenty-five similes taken from the AST were used in the present study (cf. appendix B). This test consisted of incomplete sentences which were read to the child by the researcher; the child was then required to fill in the missing word. For example, the researcher read *Iets is so groen soos...* and the child was expected to respond with a one-word answer such as *gras*. The similes test aims to assess the child's ability to categorize and define words and to make apt comparisons (Pretorius 1989:24).

3.5. Adult ratings of opacity and transparency

Adult ratings of test items were carried out by one Afrikaans-speaking remedial teacher and one English-speaking foundation phase teacher. The purpose of attaining adult ratings was to establish the suitability of the tests from a third party. The two informants were required to rate the idioms and their contexts on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being transparent and 5 being opaque. It was found that the teachers' ratings were on par with each other and fairly accurate as to how the participants had experienced the idioms and their contexts. In no instance was any one of the contexts rated as more opaque than the idiomatic phrase, thus supporting the value and reliability of the material used for testing.

3.6. Data collection procedure

Each participant was asked to give the meaning of 25 Afrikaans idioms. An idiomatic phrase¹⁶ was read to the child first without providing any helpful context, such as *Hy is 'n bobbejaan*. If the participant failed to respond, supplied an incorrect or literal answer, or needed prompting, the idiom was placed in a context – such as *Jannie dink dat melk van Pick 'n Pay af kom en nie van 'n koei nie. Hy is 'n bobbejaan*. The second test which was administered was a test on Afrikaans similes. As stated above, the child was read a sentence, which he was requested to complete with one word.

Only researcher and child were present during the sessions. Parents were given the option of being present; however, all declined the offer. This was ideal, as the presence of an adult may have inhibited or otherwise influenced the child's responses. One of the five schools permitted the tests to be done during school hours and another school supplied a venue where the children could be tested straight after school. Of the participants included in this study, nine were tested at their school in the venue provided, one was tested during school hours, three were tested at their aftercare centres and five were tested at home. The sessions were approximately half an hour long. The L2 speakers took slightly longer, but not one session of any of the groups exceeded 40 minutes. The extended length of time in the case of the L2 speakers was often on

¹⁶ Idioms as read without context will be referred to as idiomatic phrases. Idioms as read in context will be referred to as idioms placed in context.

account of the researcher having to translate the items after they were first read in Afrikaans. Some children, regardless of their grouping, took longer either because they were unsure of an answer and paused for long periods of time in between, or because they spoke confidently, producing lengthy answers.¹⁷

Prior to administering the tests, a brief discussion took place on the notion of figurative language, accompanied by examples. Participants were first asked if they knew what figurative or metaphorical language is. None of the participants gave a correct answer. Participants were then given an example to illustrate the concept of figurative language. They were asked what one meant if one said that *someone ate like a pig*.¹⁸ All participants were able to give an appropriate explanation, such as *He eats badly; He has no manners; He does not use a knife and fork* or *He is a messy eater*. It was further explained that one uses figurative language to convey an idea about something or someone. One does not mean that he is a pig that walks on four legs and has a pink skin and a tail; rather, one means that his manner, specifically the way in which he eats, is like that of a pig. One is reminded of how a pig eats when one looks at that person eating.

It was explained that the words one uses in figurative language do not have the exact same meaning as what they normally would. The notion of conveying ideas was emphasized over and above literal meaning. This introduction appeared to be quite abstract to many of the participants, regardless of their grouping. This introduction served to help those who were unfamiliar with the concept of figurative language and allowed the researcher to ascertain whether any of the participants were familiar with this topic.

The participants were then asked if they knew what an idiom was. Only participant AFR10A gave a correct answer. Of the 18 participants, he was the most advanced in terms of age, grade, and reading mark, and had covered some idioms in the Grade 4 syllabus. Participants were then given the following example of an idiom placed in context, with appropriate intonation and facial expressions:

¹⁷ Child-internal variables will be discussed in greater detail as a qualitative analysis of the data in chapter 4.

¹⁸ Although this sentence is in the form of a simile, it still illustrates a simple metaphorical notion where an image is created.

Daar is 'n dogtertjie en sy trek haar skoene aan die verkeerde voet aan, sy sit melk in die ketel in plaas van water, sy bak 'n koek en sy vergeet om meel by te sit, sy sit die oond aan en vergeet daarvan. Toe sê haar ma vir die dogtertjie: "Dogtertjie, jy is deur die blare". Wat bedoel die ma as sy vir die dogtertjie sê: "Dogtertjie, jy is deur die blare"?

Seventeen of the participants ventured an answer; only one gave no response. Both correct and plausible answers were given. Answers such as *Sy is stout* were considered to be plausible answers. However, the participants who gave these less correct answers were prompted with questions until they arrived at a correct answer and it was felt that they had understood. Examples of answers which were considered to be correct or more correct were *Sy is deurmekaar*; *Sy weet nie wat sy doen nie*; *Sy doen dinge verkeerd* or *Sy dink nie lekker nie*. Answers pertaining to the same ideas were supplied by the English-speaking participants, who all responded in English.

The definition of an idiom was then explained as a phrase of words that people use to explain a situation or give their opinion. The combination of the words of an idiom does not have the same meaning as the individual words. It should not be taken literally; rather, it is "all about ideas". For the English-speaking children, the instructions and context of the idiom were given in English, with only the idiom *Sy is deur die blare* given in Afrikaans.

The participant was then told that he would be read a sentence which he must explain. Participants were reassured that their answers could not be wrong, and that they should merely say what they think about the sentence. They were also told that, in some instances, they would be told a short story in which the idiom was placed in context, and would then be asked to respond to that.¹⁹ All sessions were tape recorded with the child's and parent's permission. All participants completed the tests and co-operated well throughout the session. In most cases, participants appeared engaged with the researcher and the task at hand.

¹⁹ See appendix A for idiomatic phrases and idioms placed in context.

3.7. Scoring of responses

Scoring was based on scoring categories proposed by Nippold (1991:103) and used by Cain et al. (2004). The categories by which answers were differentiated were (i) correct/idiomatic explanation, (ii) related explanation, (iii) restatement/repetition of idiom, (iv) unrelated explanation, (v) literal meaning explained, and (vi) no response. Examples of what was taken to be an appropriate answer for each category are given below. These examples were taken from answers supplied by the participants.

Idiom:	<i>Ek is nie onder 'n kalkoen uitgebroei nie.</i>
Correct answer:	<i>Ek is nie stupid nie.</i>
Related answer:	<i>Ek lyk nie so simpel soos 'n turkey nie.</i>
Restatement:	<i>'n Kalkoen het my nie in 'n eier gelê nie.²⁰</i>
Unrelated answer:	<i>Jy kom nie uit 'n kalkoen nie, jy kom uit 'n hoender uit. 'n Hoender broei jou uit, dan is jy net 'n kleintjie, dan raak jy net so groot soos hy.</i>
Literal interpretation:	<i>Ek is uit my ma se maag uitgebroei.</i>
No response:	<i>Ek weet nie.</i>

After tape recorded sessions were transcribed, answers were tabulated according to these six categories. Scores tallied for the idiom test included both correct and related answers in both categories of questions asked on idiomatic phrases and idioms placed in context. Related answers were included, because it was often evident or judged to be highly probable that the meaning of the idiom was understood, yet the answer was not well verbalised by the participant. This was, predictably, especially the case for the participants with SLI. In cases where the participants had given related answers, they were prompted and asked to explain themselves further in order to ascertain whether they did in fact have an idea of, or were able to grasp, the concept. In instances of prompting, leading questions were avoided.

²⁰ This sentence could also be interpreted as a literal interpretation. Not all answers were clear cut as to what category they should be placed in. The participants were asked to elaborate if the researcher was in doubt. Another means to control for this was to strive for consistency throughout all the groups regarding the ratings/categorizing of ambiguous answers by making comparisons between answers.

Careful consideration was given to those questions which were categorized as related answers. No participant had more related answers than correct answers. It was decided that related answers should be included in order to give a better overall impression of the participants' performance regarding their inferencing abilities. A bar chart illustrating the participants' performance including both correct and related answers was drawn up, as well as bar charts representing only correct answers of both idiomatic phrases and idioms.

The idiom test was tallied out of a total of 50, including both the 25 idiomatic phrases (i.e., idioms presented without context), and the 25 idioms presented in context. In instances where participants gave the correct answer for the idiomatic phrase, and the context was not needed, the participant was awarded two points.

The similes were not treated in the same manner as the idioms regarding scoring. Only those similes which were correct, being those answers befitting the actual expressions such as *so glad soos ... (seep)* received marks. In this case, only *seep* was accepted. Several suitable answers were provided, by which is meant answers in which the logic behind the answer was evident. However, these answers were not awarded marks. Examples of such suitable answers which were given for the simile *so glad soos ...* were *'n eierdop*, *plastiek*, and *slippery rocks*.

3.8. Statistical analysis

A statistical analysis was done by using the Kruskal-Wallis test, which is a method for testing equality of population medians among groups. As it is a non-parametric method, the Kruskal-Wallis test does not assume a normal population. This means that population variabilities among groups do not have to be equal in order for this procedure to be performed. Given the inherent heterogeneity of the population with SLI (Aram 1991:84-85), this statistical method was deemed appropriate. Confidence levels of .05 or less were taken to indicate significant differences between groups.

Chapter 4 – Results and discussion

Throughout this chapter of the representation and analysis of the data, all tables representing raw scores are followed by bar charts which provide a clear visual presentation of the participants' scores. Written analyses of general trends and discussions of anomalies are also provided. (Graphs depicting the Kruskal-Wallis analyses are provided in appendix B). Individual cases are discussed and qualitative assessments of participant-internal variables are provided where deemed applicable.

4.1. Overview of results

Table 4.1 shows the raw scores obtained by the participants in both the idioms and similes tests. The scores presented in the idioms column include both the correct and related answers given in both instances (i.e., where idiomatic phrases were presented on their own and where they were presented in context).

Table 4.1. Raw scores achieved by participants on the idioms and similes tests

Reading Mark	Participant SLI	Idioms Total 50	Similes Total 25	Participant AFR.	Idioms Total 50	Simile Total 25	Participant ENG.	Idioms Total 50	Similes Total 25
3	8ASLI	20	4	8AAFR	19	7	8AENG	9	3
2+	9ASLI	10	6	9BAFR	25	7	9AENG	15	8
2+	9BSLI	14	5	9BAFR	21	4	9BENG	9	3
2	9CSLI	12	4	9CAFR	16	8	9CENG	26	6
3	10ASLI	16	6	10AAFR	30	9	10AENG	19	7
2	10BSLI	8	3	10BAFR	16	5	10BENG	13	6

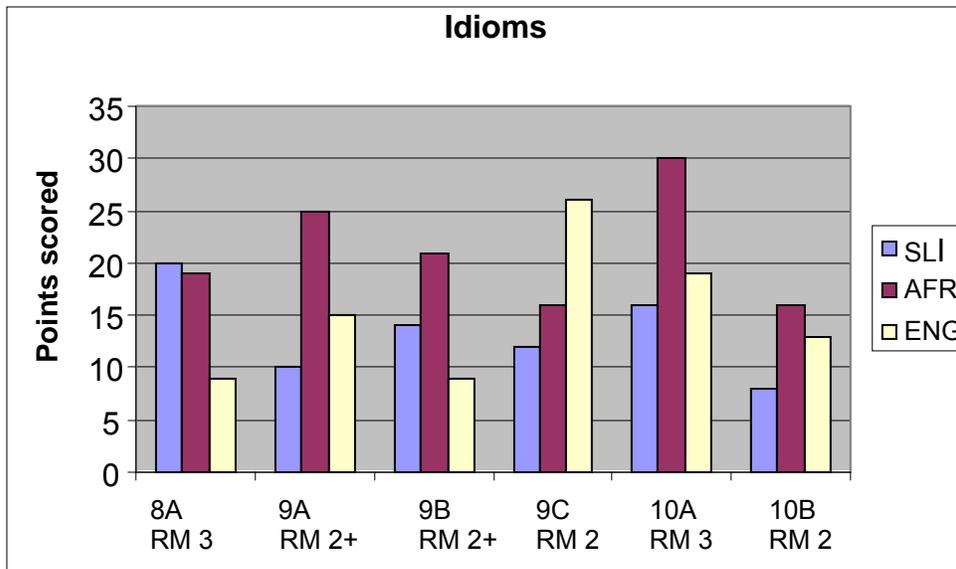


Figure 4.1. Bar chart illustrating raw scores achieved on the idioms test

4.1.1. General trends

Regarding the idioms test, the raw scores depicted in table 4.1 achieved by the participants indicate that the best performers, in general, were the typically developing Afrikaans L1 speakers (AFR group). The second best performing group was the typically developing English L2 speakers (ENG group). The SLI group in general performed more poorly than the other two groups.

The AFR group out-performed the SLI group in four out of the six cases and out-performed the ENG group in five out of the six cases. The ENG group out-performed the SLI group in four out of the six cases. In most instances, the participants' reading abilities appear to be the predominantly salient factor which determined their performance, obviously in relation to their grouping of SLI, AFR or ENG. There is no clear developmental trend, i.e., there is no clear increase in scores as age increases from 8 to 10 years.

It is clear that there are far more marked differences between the scores achieved on the idioms test as opposed to the similes test. The differences between the scores achieved on the similes test are only marginal across all groups, and it is therefore

difficult to comment conclusively on these scores, as will be shown under the statistical analysis of the similes test (see section 4.2)²¹.

4.1.2. Notable performance of SLI participants

There were only two participants whose scores are unexpected in terms of the hypotheses. These two anomalies were 8ASLI and 9CENG. Participant 8ASLI performed the best, if only by one point, but nevertheless attained an unusually high score in relation to the prediction for this study. 9CENG's score is also particularly high in comparison to the other L2 speakers. These two anomalies are discussed briefly below, but participant 9CENG's superior performance will also be discussed in chapter 5, section 5.4, which addresses the performance of the L2 speakers, where more details and possible explanations will be provided for his uncharacteristic performance.

Figure 4.1 provides an illustration of the data represented in table 4.1, showing not only the inter-group trends but also the intra-group trends amongst the three groups. Here one can clearly see the two anomalies, namely, 8ASLI and 9CENG. Of the participants with SLI, 8ASLI achieved the highest score (viz. 20/50) in the idioms test; the best-performing typically developing L1 participant, 8AAFR, obtained a score of 19. It was not predicted that 8ASLI would perform so well. As a possible explanation for his superior performance, one should re-evaluate 8ASLI's language history. He was one of the SLI participants who was not diagnosed with a severe case of language impairment but rather a mild language delay with a barely significant difference between his verbal and non verbal IQ. If one were to make a qualitative assessment based on possible child-internal variables which may have played a role, participant 8ASLI can be said to have displayed traits of a self-assured child who spoke confidently.

Participant 10BSLI fared the worst on both the idioms and similes tests with a score of 8 and 3, respectively. Contrary to the language history of participant 8ASLI, that of 10BSLI revealed difficulties with word categorizations and associations, particularly in relation to context. He also had difficulties with sentence structures and tenses. He was said to have a limited capacity for abstract thinking and reasoning. The difference between his verbal and non-verbal IQ is pronounced. He was repeating Grade 4 at the time of

²¹ Cf. figure appendix B.

testing. He was also diagnosed with ADHD. The severity of his language disability is a highly plausible explanation for his poor performance.

4.1.3. Notable performance of AFR participants

Participant 10AAFR scored the highest in the AFR group on both the idioms and similes tests. This outcome was anticipated, as he was the most advanced participant in terms of age, grade and reading mark. He had further advantages of being an L1 Afrikaans speaking typically developing child who had received formal tuition on idioms and similes. Participants 9CAFR and 10BAFR fared the worst on the idioms test with scores of 16 each. What these two participants have in common is a reading mark of 2. They are the only two AFR participants who have the lowest reading mark in this study.

4.1.4. Notable performance of ENG participants

In the ENG group, participant 9CENG fared the best, achieving a score of 26. As mentioned previously this was unexpected. This participant has an Afrikaans reading mark of 2 and is an L2 speaker which theoretically would suggest a potentially poor performance. However, he had English and German as his home languages, and it seemed worth investigating whether, or to what extent (if any), his knowledge of German, or English for that matter, had helped him during the tests (cf. chapter 5, section 5.4).

Participant 8AENG and 9BENG fared the worst on the idioms test. Participant 8AENG had an Afrikaans reading mark of 3 which theoretically should have resulted in a higher score achieved on the tests, but he was unfortunately not sufficiently bilingual to translate or understand the tests, nor was participant 10BENG able to translate or understand Afrikaans sufficiently for the tests to be carried out in solely in Afrikaans. Large portions of the tests were translated into English by the researcher for both 8AENG and 10BENG. Participant 9BENG's low score is thought to be on account of misleading translations made by the participant.²²

²² This question will be addressed further in section chapter 5, sections 5.3 to 5.7, where the L2 speakers' performance will be discussed in further detail regarding their translation abilities and the role played by their L1 in terms of positive or negative transfers which may have occurred.

4.2. Similes test

As can be seen from figure 4.2, in one out of the six groups, the SLI participant 9B fared best and in two of the six groups the ENG participants (9A and 10B) fared best. In most instances, however, differences between scores were only marginal, often only by one point: The mean score of the AFR group was 7/25, that of the ENG group 6/25, and that of the SLI group 5/25, as was the pattern for the idioms test, in which the AFR group achieved the highest score, the ENG group ranking second, followed by the SLI group. The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that these differences were not statistically significant ($F_{2,15}=1.9675$; $p=0.17$).²³

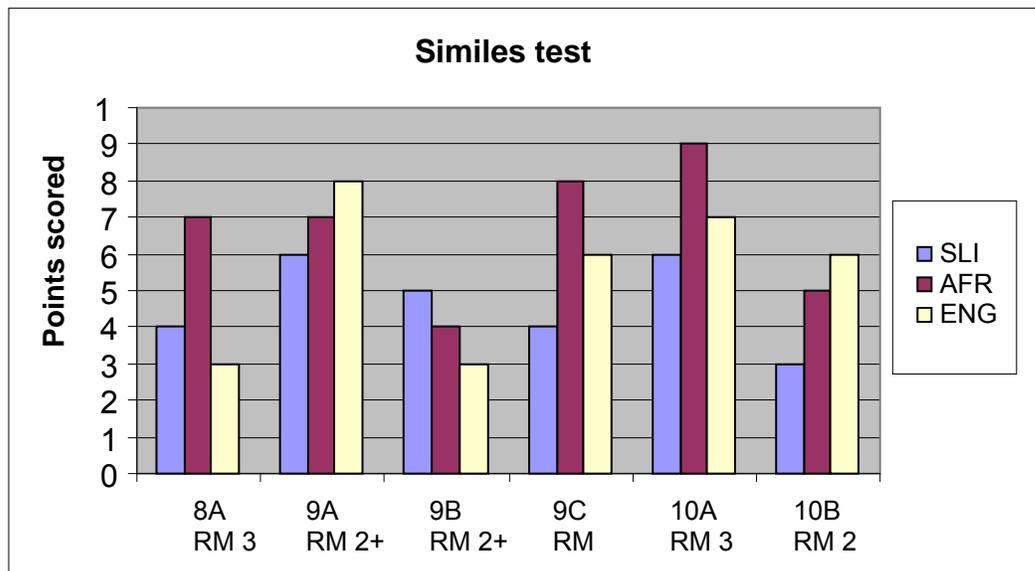


Figure 4.2. Bar chart illustrating raw scores achieved on the similes test

4.3. Idioms test

4.3.1. Results

The mean score of the AFR group for the idiom test was 21/50, the Eng group had a mean score of 15/50, and the SLI group a score of 13/50. The AFR group's performance was superior to that of the other two groups, and the ENG group's performance was also marginally superior to that of the SLI group. However, the statistical analysis of the

²³ Cf. figure b2. appendix B.

performance of the three groups on the idioms test, using the Kruskal-Wallis test, showed a p-value of 0.06, which is just above the 5% significance level (0.05); $F_{2,15}=3.3060$.²⁴ It can therefore be concluded, based on the statistical analysis of the data concerning the idioms test totalled out of 50, that there are no differences between the groups, thus refuting the general hypothesis for this study, being that the differences between the typically developing and SLI group would be pronounced.

Table 4.2 provides the raw scores of the correct answers only and the correct and related answers given for both idiomatic phrases and idioms placed in context. The purpose of making the comparison between both the correct and correct and related scores was to illustrate that in no instance were any of the participants scores altered in terms of where they ranked in relation to one another when taking into consideration the related as well as the correct answers. The inclusion of related answers only increased the participants' scores.

Table 4.2. Raw scores of correct and correct and related answers

Reading Mark	Participant SLI	Correct Only	Correct & related	Participant AFR.	Correct Only	Correct & related	Participant ENG.	Correct Only	Correct & related
3	8ASLI	15	20	8AAFR	10	19	8AENG	6	9
2+	9ASLI	7	10	9BAFR	21	25	9AENG	13	15
2+	9BSLI	8	14	9BAFR	16	21	9BENG	5	9
2	9CSLI	8	12	9CAFR	13	16	9CENG	22	26
3	10ASLI	11	16	10AAFR	29	30	10AENG	18	19
2	10BSLI	7	8	10BAFR	12	16	10BENG	9	13

²⁴ Cf. figure b1. appendix B.

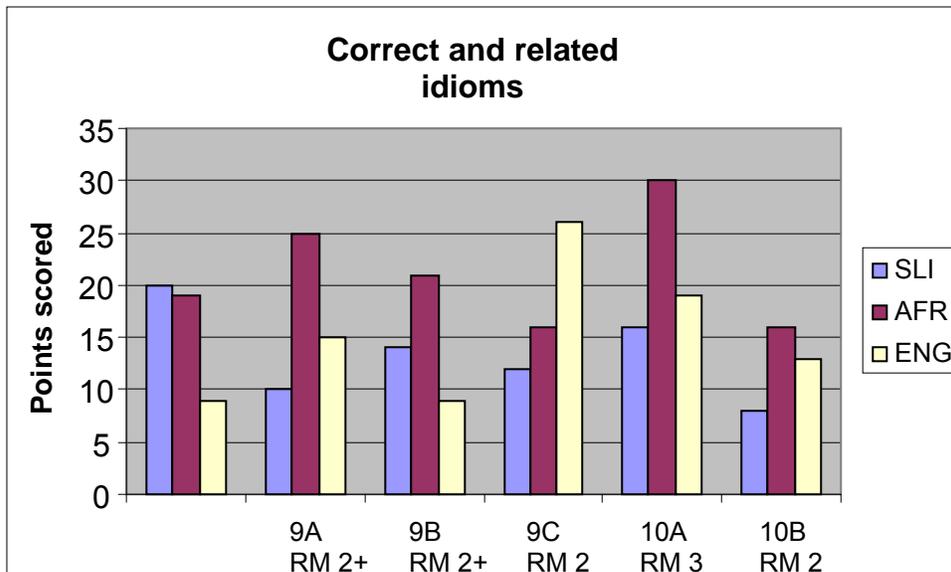


Figure 4.3. Bar chart illustrating correct and related answers on idioms (with and without context).

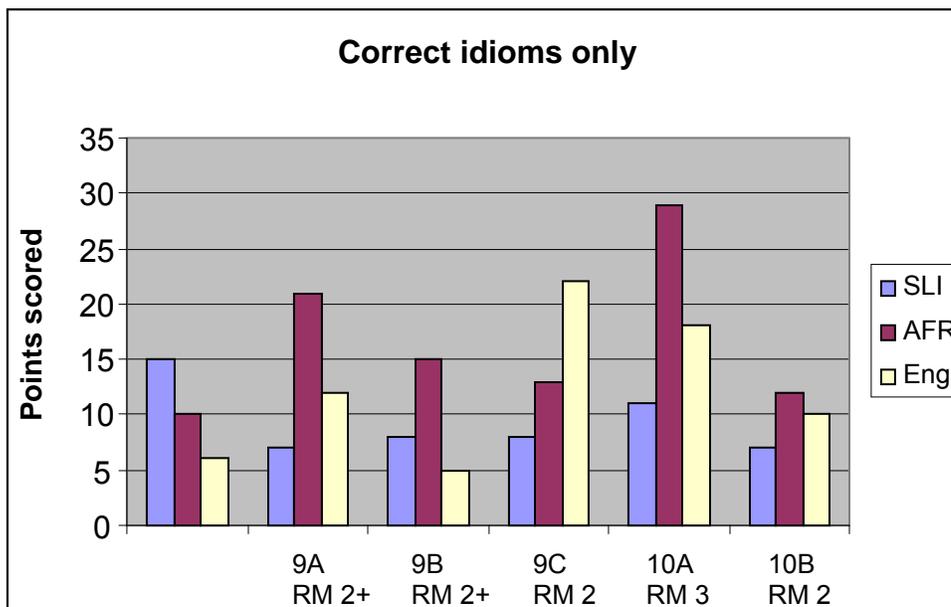


Figure 4.4. Bar chart illustrating the correct answers only, on idioms (with and without context)

Figures 4.3 and 4.4 illustrate that, despite the inclusion of related answers, the correct and related answers are still consistent with the general trends occurring with only the

correct answers. There is one case worth mentioning in terms of the number of related answers accepted, and that is participant 8AAFR who has the largest discrepancy of all the participants between his two scores. He obtained a score of 10 for his correct answers and a score of 19 for his correct and related answers. On reviewing the forms completed by his parents, it was noted that his parents had stated on his consent forms that he becomes extremely nervous when placed in certain situations which seemed to be the case when the interview was conducted. The parents also stated that not only does he become shy, but a sure sign of his nervousness is in his soft almost inaudible manner of talking and use of short sentences. This participant did not venture lengthy answers. He did, however, ask for clarification when and if he was uncertain about something. It is possible that his shyness may have contributed to his lack of willingness to elaborate and he was thus given the benefit of the doubt for “borderline” answers.

4.3.2. The role of context in the comprehension of the idioms

To examine the role played by context, scores were compared between only the correct answers for the idiomatic phrases and the idioms placed in context. The results of this comparison are presented in table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Raw scores of idiomatic phrases and idioms placed in context

Reading Mark (RM)	Participant SLI	Idiomatic Phrases /25	Idioms Context /25	Participant AFR.	Idiomatic Phrases /25	Idioms Context /25	Participant ENG.	Idiomatic phrases /25	Idioms context /25
3	8ASLI	2	13	8AAFR	2	8	8AENG	0	6
2+	9ASLI	0	7	9BAFR	7	15	9AENG	4	8
2+	9BSLI	0	8	9BAFR	2	13	9BENG	2	3
2	9CSLI	0	8	9CAFR	4	9	9CENG	10	12
3	10ASLI	2	9	10AAFR	18	11	10AENG	8	10
2	10BSLI	0	7	10BAFR	6	6	10BENG	4	6

One can deduce from the raw scores in table 4.3, that context aided all participants to a greater or lesser degree.

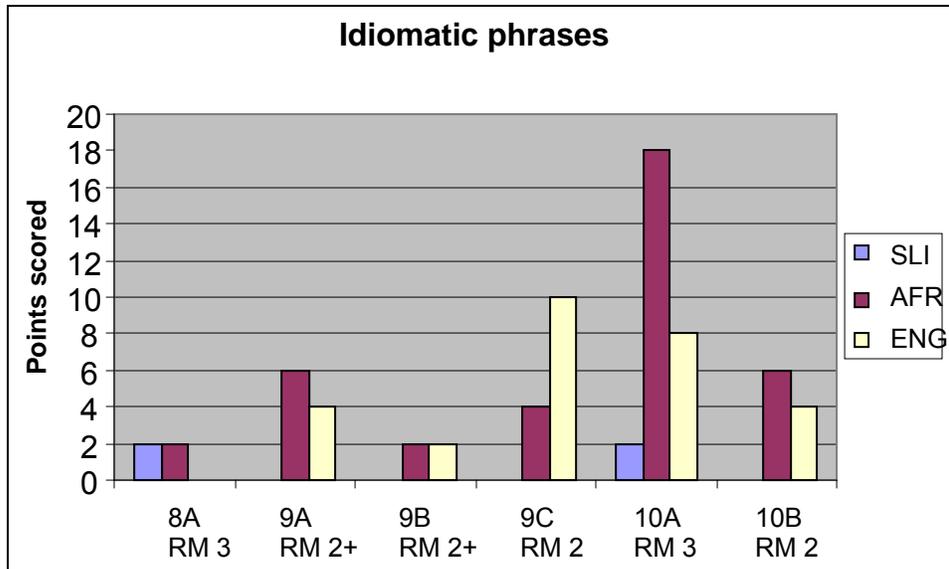


Figure 4.5. Bar chart illustrating scores achieved on idiomatic phrases

4.3.2.1. Idiomatic phrases (idioms with no context provided)

The mean scores (7/25 for the AFR group, 5/25 for the ENG group and 1/25 for the SLI group) show that the AFR group performed the best, followed fairly closely by the ENG group. The SLI group again fared the worst. Again though, the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups ($F_{2,15}=3.1508$; $p=0.07$).²⁵ An anomaly, however, was that the confidence interval for the SLI group stretched below 0, which is technically not possible because the scores are all positive. This anomaly indicated violations of the assumptions of normality, and to counter this, a non-parametric bootstrap analysis²⁶ was used to calculate more accurate confidence intervals. This analysis indicated that the SLI group fared significantly worse ($p<0.05$) than the other two groups. The most homogenous group proved to be the SLI group and the least homogenous group the AFR group, contrary to what was expected and stated in the literature. This may mean that the SLI participants who took part in this study were indeed well matched in terms of their diagnoses. Alternatively, it could mean that all children with SLI experience great difficulties with the acquisition of figurative language, whereas typically developing children do acquire figurative language but are in different stages of such acquisition; hence the heterogeneity in their performance.

²⁵ Cf. figure b3. appendix B.

²⁶ Cf. figure b4. appendix B.

As can be seen from figure 4.5, only two of the six SLI participants achieved any score on idiomatic phrases, both obtaining a score of 2. Again, 9CENG is an anomaly, outperforming the other two matched peers as well as all other participants in his group and all but one AFR participant whose superior performance can most likely be attributed to having received formal tuition on idioms. There are two possible reasons for the SLI participants' poor performance. The first possibility is that, due to their language disabilities, they could not infer meaning from even the transparent idioms. The second is that they have not been exposed to idioms in the past or managed to pick up on them in common speech. As mentioned before, figurative language learning is not carried out at the special needs schools attended by these children for precisely the reason that they experience difficulty with it.

It is difficult to draw final conclusions based on the scores of the idiomatic phrases, as it was not clear at times, even to the children themselves who provided correct answers to the idiomatic phrases, whether they had, from the idiomatic expressions, inferred the meaning themselves or whether they were simply retrieving the meaning from stored knowledge as one would retrieve definitions of words from one's mental lexicon.

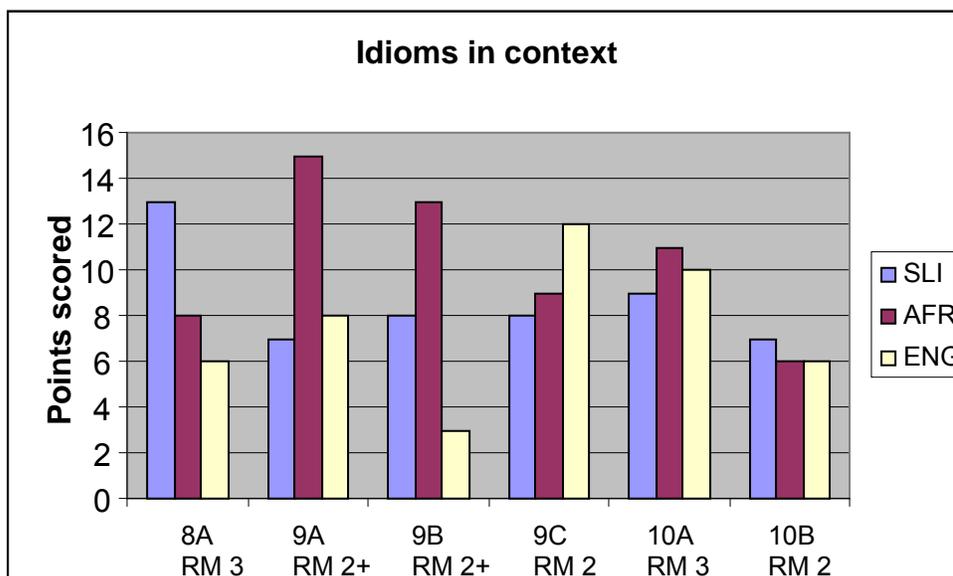


Figure 4.6. Bar chart indicating scores achieved on idioms placed in context

4.3.2.2. Idioms in context

The mean scores show that the AFR group achieved the highest score of 10/25, with the SLI group in second position with a score of 9/25, and the ENG in last place with a score of 8/25. The test on idioms placed in context is the only instance where the SLI group scored slightly higher than the ENG group. The SLI group's improved performance in relation to the ENG group is assumed to be based on the advantage the SLI speakers had of being Afrikaans L1 speakers. Again, these scores differ only marginally, and larger sample sizes would be required to draw conclusive conclusions.

The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that, indeed, these differences between the groups were not statistically significant ($F_{2,15}=1.3808$; $p=0.28$).²⁷ The ENG group in particular experienced difficulty with the idioms placed in context. The ENG group's poorer performance may also – for those who were able to understand and translate the tests – be attributed to them experiencing a memory/cognitive overload, more so than what an L1 speaker would, thus hampering their performance.

By comparing figures 4.5 and 4.6, it is clear that context had an immense impact on the scores of the participants. This outcome is in accordance with the literature consulted in chapter 2 as far as the typically developing participants are concerned (see for example Levorato and Cacciari 1992; Cain, Oakhill, Barnes and Byrant 2001). However, contrary to the second statement of hypothesis 6 for this study and some studies consulted (see for example Lee and Kamhi 1990; Botting and Adams 2005) on the use of context by children with language impairments, context proved to be the most beneficial for the SLI group (cf. hypothesis 6 section 4.4 for a detailed discussion).

Not all of the individuals' performance were anticipated. Only one participant, 10AAFR, who was expected to fare best, being the strongest participant, came down on his score when the idioms were placed in context, and ranked third in his AFR group. He obtained a score of 18 for the amount of correct answers given for the idiomatic phrases, but achieved a score of only 11 for the idioms placed in context. Again, participants 8ASLI and 9CENG ranked first in their groups. What is noticeable in figure 4.6 is that there is more consistency within the older groups of three, namely groups 9C, 10A and 10B than

²⁷ Cf. figure b.5. appendix B.

amongst the younger groups, which may hint at a developmental trend. This is, however, the only instance where this is seen to occur.

From the scores achieved by the SLI participants on the idioms placed in context, it appears that the SLI participants' poor performance may have been on account of a lack of exposure to idiomatic phrases rather than an inability to infer meaning, but not necessarily. However, it also illustrates that the SLI group was particularly reliant on additional information in order to draw inferences and could not decipher meaning from even transparent idiomatic phrases. Since children with SLI are deemed to be following the developmental path of that of younger children, this then ties in with Levorato and Cacciari (1999) finding that younger children were more reliant on context as opposed to semantic analysis.

4.3.3. Literal answers given in the idioms test

Table 4.4 shows the number of literal answers supplied by the participants on both idiomatic phrases and idioms placed in context (cf. also figure 4.7 and figure 4.8). It is clear from the raw scores presented in this table that, in all groups, there were far less literal interpretations given when the idioms were placed in context than compared to the high scores of literal interpretations with the idiomatic phrases – again proving that context aided all participants in reaching the correct conclusions.

Table 4.4. Raw scores of literal answers

Partici- pant SLI	Idiom Phrases Literal	Idioms Context Literal	Partici- pant AFR.	Idiom Phrases Literal	Idioms context Literal	Partici- pant ENG.	Idiom phrases Literal	Idioms context Literal
8ASLI	5	0	8AAFR	7	2	8AENG	7	4
9ASLI	10	7	9AAFR	5	3	9AENG	7	7
9BSLI	10	2	9BAFR	8	1	9BENG	5	4
9CSLI	8	2	9CAFR	5	1	9CENG	7	3
10ASLI	3	1	10AAFR	2	0	10AENG	4	0
10BSLI	9	4	10BAFR	4	1	10BENG	3	1

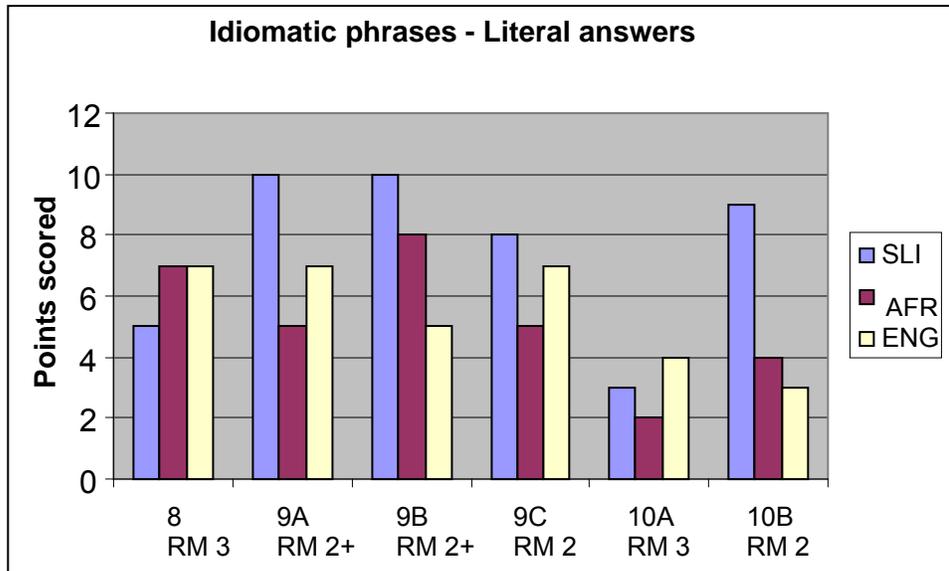


Figure 4.7. Bar chart indicating amount of literal answers provided for the idiomatic phrases

4.3.3.1. Literal answers to idiomatic phrases

The mean score achieved by the AFR group was 5/25, the ENG group 6/25, and the SLI group 8/25. These mean scores vary only slightly, but indicate that the SLI group, as anticipated and as stated in the literature, gave more literal answers for the idiomatic phrases than the other two groups. The AFR group, as expected, fared better than the ENG group. The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that these differences were non-significant ($F_{2,15}=1.7954$; $p=0.20$).²⁸

As can be seen in figure 4.7, 8ASLI's performance is again anomalous, as he achieved the lowest score within his age, grade and reading matched peers. Unlike what has been the case for most of the previously discussed scores, 9CENG, in this instance, is not an anomaly. 8AAFR's and 8AENG's achieved the same score. Both these participants received the test in their L1 for which they both have a reading mark of 3.

10BSLI provided far more literal interpretations than his age, grade and reading matched peers. This was to be expected gauging from an assessment of his previous results. 10ASLI's score is unexpectedly low. Participant 10AAFR gave the least amount of literal interpretations of all the participants, as expected, being the strongest participant.

²⁸ Cf. figure b.6. appendix B.

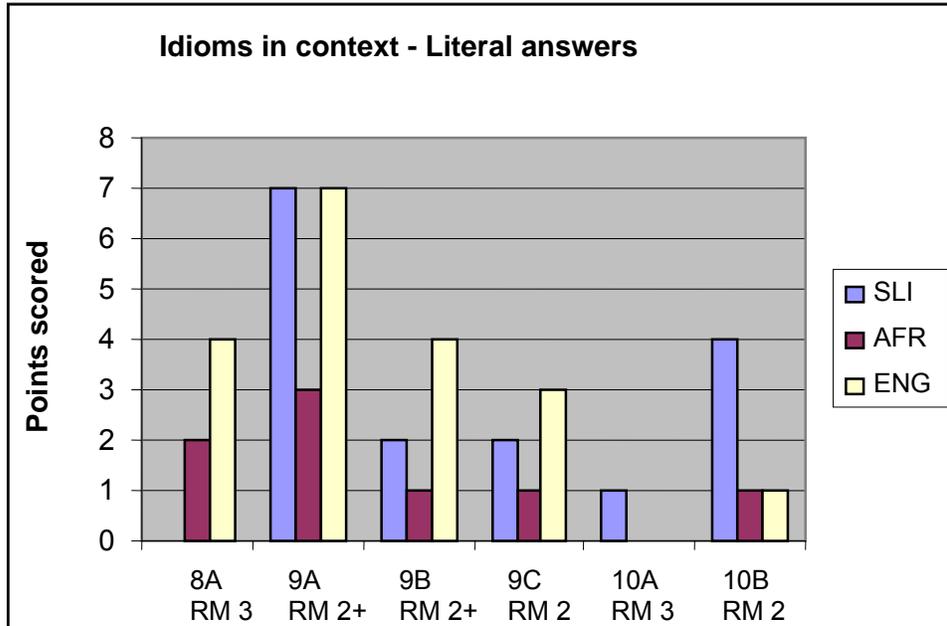


Figure 4.8. Bar chart indicating amount of literal answers provided for the idioms placed in context

4.3.3.2. Literal answers to idioms in context

The mean scores for the literal interpretations of the idioms placed in context, again only differ fractionally from one another. The AFR group scored the lowest (1/25), which was anticipated; and the SLI and ENG groups obtained equal scores (3/25). The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated the differences to be statistically non-significant ($F_{2,15}=1.1975$; $p=0.33$)²⁹ as one can also gauge from the mean scores.

The bar chart 4.7 shows that, again, 8ASLI gave no literal answers, which was unexpected. 9CENG's score is here not considered to be an anomaly. Participant 9ASLI gave several literal answers. According to his speech-language therapist, he experiences difficulty with reasoning, definitions, sentence structure and tenses. He has a very large discrepancy between his verbal and non-verbal IQ. His history supplies no palpable evidence for his many literal interpretations. It appears that the SLI participants with higher reading marks gave fewer literal interpretations. In general, there was no such clear tendency in the two typically developing groups. Rather, the number of literal

²⁹ Cf. figure b7. appendix b.

answers appeared to decrease with an increase in age in the typically developing groups, with the 10-year-old groups providing the fewest literal interpretations. It may be that the older children were able to rule out literal interpretations as possible answers, thus displaying an awareness of what is deemed acceptable or not, but not able to provide a correct answer. It also shows that the SLI group, when considering their age, are behind that of the typically developing participants in terms of providing non-literal answers, and that their performance is related to their language ability rather than age. These findings match those of Botting and Adams (2005).³⁰

Figure 4.8 shows that the provision of context reduced the number of literal interpretations particularly of the L1 typically developing group. Figure 4.8 furthermore indicates that participant 10ASLI, who was said to be experiencing SPLD, in general fared better than expected. This is in accordance with the literature consulted in chapter 2 (Bishop and Adams 1992; Botting and Adams 2005:59, Nippold 1991:100, Norbury 2004; and Bishop 2000; Vance and Wells 1994), where it was concluded that there were no significant differences between the performance of those with SLI and SPLD.³¹ Unfortunately, participant 10ASLI is the only participant who had a diagnosis of SPLD and thus cannot be compared to any participants in that regard.

4.4. Summary of results

The results are summarized below in relation to the hypotheses laid out in chapter 2. Hypotheses are repeated here, for the sake of convenience.

Hypothesis 1: The children with SLI will not fare as well on the idiom test as the typically developing children of both the L1 and the L2 groups, regardless of whether idioms were tested in isolation or in context, especially considering the nature of the task which was solely verbal and did not present the participant with visual aids or possible answers to choose from.

³⁰ Cf. chapter 2, section 2.9.2.

³¹ Ideally more participants with SPLD would be needed to draw conclusive conclusions.

This hypothesis was not borne out by the data. The performance of the SLI group was indeed slightly inferior to that of the other two groups, but was not statistically significantly lower than that of the other two groups.

Hypothesis 2: The L1 speakers will fare better than the L2 speakers on the idiom test.

This hypothesis was also not borne out by the data. The ENG group's mean scores on the idioms test was indeed lower than those of the AFR group, but the difference in scores between these two groups was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3: The typically developing children will be more likely to recognize incongruity between the idiomatic expressions and the context, particularly the older children and/or those with stronger reading abilities.

The highest number of no responses were observed amongst the SLI and ENG groups. Theoretically, this is assumed to be due to a lack of understanding, either linguistic or conceptual, rather than attributable to the recognition of incongruence. However, without feedback on online processing from the participants, it is difficult to draw conclusions. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked in the case of the SLI participants, in particular, that the comprehension of figurative language was assessed, but required production from the participants, thus more comprehension may have taken place but was not able to be expressed.

Hypothesis 4: As was the case in previous studies, it is anticipated that, for all groups, general competence should increase with age. Yet, as the age range is not particularly wide, clear differences may not be noticeable. Therefore, it is expected that reading ability will possibly be the surer indicator of performance.

Reading ability did prove to be a surer indicator of performance as opposed to age. Developmental trends (in terms of age) were only seen in certain instances, particularly amongst the typically developing groups where literal interpretations were tallied up. Ideally a larger sample size would produce clearer trends.

Hypothesis 5: It is predicted that the SLI group will provide more literal answers for the idioms test.

The SLI group did produce more literal answers than the other two groups, but the results were not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 6: It is predicted, as has been confirmed by other studies, that context will play an important role in comprehension, but may prove to be of less assistance to the participants with SLI.

Context did benefit all groups. Contrary to the second assumption made in hypothesis 6, context proved to be the most beneficial for the SLI group – the difference between their scores obtained on the idiomatic phrases and those on the idioms in context was the largest of all three groups. Younger children are said to be more reliant on context in figurative language interpretation than the information they are able to obtain from a semantic analysis. Considering that children with SLI are deemed to be following a developmental path similar to that of a younger child, it may well explain the SLI group's improvement with the aid of context.

Hypothesis 7: It is predicted that the children with SLI will fare much the same as the two typically developing groups due to the explicitness of similes. It is expected here that there will be little difference between the three groups as far as plausible answers are concerned. "Plausible answers" are those answers in which the logic behind the answers will be evident. It is expected, though, that the L1 speakers – including the SLI group, as they are after all L1 speakers - may provide more correct answers than the L2 speakers, meaning that they would supply the correct word befitting the fixed expression.

This hypothesis proved to be true and concurs for example with the findings of Seidenberg and Bernstein (1986) regarding similes and children with SLI. All groups were able to produce plausible answers and the amount of accurate answers supplied by each group barely differed. Similes are not the most complex form of figurative language, as they are directly and explicitly related to the literal. Even so, the SLI group's performance on the similes test as opposed to the idioms test is a reflection of

the SLI participants' ability to draw comparisons thus alluding to a basic capacity for interpreting figurative language (Reynolds and Ortony 1980).

In conclusion, it appears that, contrary to what was predicted for this study, there are no statistically significant differences in this study between the comprehension of similes and idioms by the Afrikaans-speaking children with and without SLI. As noted throughout the present chapter, this study produced certain findings comparable - to a lesser or greater degree - to those of previous studies. In the next chapter, the performance of the L2 speakers is discussed in more detail.

Chapter 5 – The L2 speaker and figurative language competence

5.1. Introduction

Figurative language competence of L2 learners, particularly of bilingual children, has been given little attention compared to L2 learners' acquisition of grammar. Experimental studies and theories of figurative language processing and use in bilinguals remain relatively scarce, as reported by Manno (1998), Cooper (1999), Durgunoglu and Öney (2000), and Martinez (2003). The evaluation of figurative language competence is often viewed as a peripheral study of L2 acquisition and is often only deemed worth exploring where a certain level of proficiency and cognitive maturity has been attained; hence most research is carried out amongst adults and not children (Hashemian and Nezhad 2006:42; Laufer 2000:186; Durgunoglu and Öney 2000).

Cooper (1999) investigated the processing strategies employed by L2 speakers during idiom processing in order to reach conclusions. The adult participants in Cooper's study were requested to give constant feedback in response to the idioms. Cooper identified strategies employed by the L2 speakers; these included repetition or paraphrasing, discussing, analysing or requesting information, guessing with reference to context, using the literal to aid interpretation correctly, using background knowledge, and referring to an idiom in their L1 (1999:243).³²

Cooper (1999) found that guessing with reference to context was the most frequently used strategy; discussing and analysing was the second most employed strategy, whereas using the literal meanings to interpret idioms was also common. The use of context and literal meanings were the most salient techniques employed by the participants of the present study. In studies conducted on children, it is more challenging to elicit conscious thought processes; however, such elicitation may produce valuable

³² Other strategies include the recalling of an incident or situation by the individual to which the idiom may have been relevant. It was found that in some instances the children related the idioms to their own personal experiences.

data.³³ Regarding Cooper's (1999) comprehension strategies, it is also assumed that more than one comprehension strategy is employed simultaneously (Cooper 1999:255). As an opposing argument to eliciting online processing, the spontaneous answers provided by the children were deemed to be of value to assess instinctive responses. Creating too much awareness around the topic of 'the conceptual' was not viewed as ideal, as it was the impromptu responses that were sought. Creating too much awareness within the child was also thought to potentially inhibit their responses (Bishop and Adams 1991; Vance and Wells 1994).

5.2. The bilingual child and cognitive development

Some studies advocate contingency between bilingualism and cognitive abilities/development (Bialystok 2002:159; Peal and Lambert 1962). The advantages between bilingualism and cognitive abilities are generally more noticeable in instances where the child has progressed beyond a minimum level of competence which includes a capacity for word segmentation and ambiguity detection, as well as syntactic and phonological awareness (Durgunoglu and Öney 2000:11; Lee 1996; Peal and Lambert 1962 as cited by Martinez 2003:11). Without administering specific tests pertaining to the above mentioned criteria, what can be reported from a theoretical framework concerning the L2 speakers of this study is that bilingual children between the ages of 8 and 10 are still assumed to be in the developmental stages of both their L2 language learning as well as their cognitive development as prescribed/addressed by the GEM (Levorato and Cacciari 1995). For the participants of this study, their Afrikaans reading marks were to suffice as an indication of their level of bilingualism and their English reading marks were to suffice as an indication of their general language aptitude, as well as possibly alluding to their cognitive and inferential abilities.

In retrospect, the L2 speakers should have been administered pre-tests to determine their degree of bilingualism, or have been required to have an Afrikaans reading mark of 3, thus aiming to compensate for the discrepancy between L1 and L2 reading evaluation carried out by the different schools, as the standards are higher when assessing L1

³³ Elicitation of conscious thought processing from the children was considered to be a tedious procedure for them to undergo, particularly the SLI children with expressive language difficulties. However, at times participants were asked to elaborate on their reasoning.

speakers. Ideally, to factor out the positive effects bilingualism may have on a child's cognitive development, both the ENG and AFR groups should have been equally bilingual groups and matched according to both their L1 and L2 reading marks.

All the L2 speakers attained an above average reading mark in their L1. Only participant 9BENG had a mark of 2+; the rest had a mark of 3. Theoretically, it is then plausible, based on the relatively high scores attained in the tests for this study coupled with their above average L1 reading abilities, that in some instances the ENG group may have been at a cognitive advantage. Phonological transfers concerning the L2 speakers will also be addressed in this chapter. Phonological transfer is said to indicate a general phonemic awareness and has been noted to occur more often in children with above average reading abilities (Ball and Blachman 1991; Bruck 1992; Troia 1999). The issue of bilingualism and cognitive abilities will not be discussed any further, largely because the AFR groups' proficiency in their L2 was unknown. This topic falls outside of the scope of this particular study, but for future reference is indeed an important aspect to factor in when dealing with bilingualism and figurative language comprehension in children.

5.3. Purpose of requesting the participants to translate the idiomatic phrases and contexts

The L2 participants were asked to translate the idioms and their contexts for the following reasons: (i) to verify whether the sentence had been understood - if not, the sentence was translated into English by the researcher; (ii) to be able to superficially assess typological similarities between Afrikaans and English by placing the idioms into categories and identifying those idioms which were more or less difficult for the L2 speakers to comprehend – also in comparison to the L1 speakers; (iii) to observe whether the participants were able to identify those idioms which exist in both English and Afrikaans or were able to respond with equivalent versions occurring in the English language; (iv) to see how the participants would interpret idioms which are virtually impossible or at best very difficult to translate from Afrikaans into English and whether they, from their own translations, could create a plausible figurative analogy; and (v) to see whether the participants would produce lexical innovations to compensate for their shortcomings in terms of vocabulary. The task was made easier for the participants, as it

has been reported that less proficient L2 speakers have less difficulty translating from their L2 into their L1 as oppose to the reverse (Kroll and Curley 1988; Peynircioglu and Tekcan 1993 as cited by Durgunoglu and Öney 2000:8).

5.4. Participant 9CENG: Typological similarities between Afrikaans, English, and German

Afrikaans, like German, is a verb-second language. The verb-second phenomenon entails the obligatory occurrence of finite verbs in the clause-second position, preceded by some clause-initial constituent (Biberauer 2002:19). Since Koster (1975), verb-second languages which demonstrate a verb-second surface word order in matrix clauses but a verb-final one in embedded clauses have been analysed as underlying SOV (Biberauer 2002:22). By contrast, English is seen to be a SVO language, with the finite verb preceding the object in active declarative matrix clauses. Differences in word order of embedded clauses (amongst other sentence types) could be seen as one of the most salient differences between these three languages.

Studies have shown cross-linguistic transfer to take place from the L1 to the L2 in both adults (Kellerman 1978; 1979; 1983; Irujo 1986; Cooper 1999) and children (Johnson 1989). Bilingual children show evidence of cross-linguistic transfer in spontaneous production of speech in their L2, particularly when there is a structural overlap of the two languages (Döpke 1998; Hulk and Müller 2000 as cited by Nicoladis 2003; Durgunoglu 1998; Lanauze and Snow 1989). Kellerman (1977;1983;1995) found that L2 speakers are likely to make transfers (or cross-linguistic references) if they perceive more typological similarities between their L1 and their L2. Since English and Afrikaans share typological similarities, it was assumed that the L2 children would make transfers from English to Afrikaans. It was considered a possibility that the Afrikaans idioms for which there are English equivalents, or versions thereof, might be more easily understood by the L2 speakers. This was also considered to be a possibility for participant 9CENG who had both English and German as a home language.

Of the twenty-five Afrikaans idiomatic phrases asked in the test, four were identified as having linguistic and conceptual similarities in Afrikaans, English and German. These four are presented in table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Afrikaans idiomatic phrases bearing linguistic and conceptual similarities in German and English

Idiom no ^a	Afrikaans	German	English
12	<i>As die kat weg is, is die muis baas</i>	<i>Ist die Katze aus dem Haus, tanzen die Mäuse auf dem Tisch³⁴</i>	<i>When the cat's away, the mice will play³⁵</i>
13	<i>Slaan die spyker op die kop</i>	<i>Den Nagel auf den Kopf treffen</i>	<i>Hit the nail on the head</i>
17	<i>Sy draai almal om haar vinger</i>	<i>Jemanden um den Finger wickeln</i>	<i>...wrapped around your finger</i>
25	<i>Aan iemand se lippe te hang</i>	<i>An jemandes Lippen hängen</i>	<i>To hang on someone's every word</i>

^aThis number refers to the order of presentation of the idioms during test administration. cf. appendix A.

For these idioms, participant 9CENG only gave a correct answer for number 12. There is not enough evidence to support the theory that he drew inferences from his home languages nor that he was familiar with the idioms which exist in all three languages.

Those contexts which were found to bear semantic, phonological, and or syntactic resemblances to German and English are listed below in table 5.2. There were indeed several semantic and phonological similarities between the languages, to a greater or lesser extent, but the more noticeably similar translations are supplied as examples. The idiomatic phrases were only included if they were thought to be similar to German. However, it was the case with most of the L2 speakers that, even if the idiomatic phrase remained undecipherable, they were able to infer meaning from the context.

³⁴ Equivalent German idioms were obtained from the knowledge of German speaking individuals.

³⁵ Equivalent English idioms were obtained from the knowledge of English speaking individuals and the *Afrikaanse Spreekwoorde Gesegdes, ens.* Kritzinger, De Villiers and Pienaar (1939), which is admittedly an old source, but the idioms have remained the same over the years.

Table 5.2. Afrikaans contexts bearing semantic, phonological and/or syntactic resemblances to German and English

Idiom no	Afrikaans	German	English
5	<i>My pa het uitgevind dat ek sy motor gestamp het</i>	<i>Mein Vater hat mitbekommen, dass ich sein Auto beschädigt habe</i>	<i>My father found out that I bumped (damaged) his car</i>
6	<i>My broer sê vir my hy het eendag 'n pienk koei in ons tuin sien rondloop. Ek sê toe vir hom ek is nie ...</i>	<i>Mein Bruder sagt mir, er hätte einmal eine rosane Kuh in unserem Garten herumlaufen sehen. Ich sagte ihm, ich bin nicht ...</i>	<i>My brother said to me that one day he saw a pink cow walking around in our garden. I said to him I wasn't...</i>
21	<i>As jy vir Jannie sê dat koeie kan vlieg...</i>	<i>Wenn du Jannie sagst, dass Kühe fliegen können...</i>	<i>If you say to Jannie that cows can fly...</i>

Regarding the contexts which resemble similarities to German and English, participant 9CENG gave correct answers for all three; however, again there is insufficient data to conclusively support the theory that his superior performance may be attributed to his knowledge of German and/or English. Without insight into his online processing which occurred at the time of testing, it is not possible to confirm or refute this theory. It is still maintained that participant 9CENG's below average reading mark is on account of factors pertaining to child-internal variables, such as the display of a shy demeanour. His reading mark was not an expected or an apt reflection of his language proficiency.

5.5. Semantic analyzability; opacity, and transparency of the idioms

Evaluations of the extent to which the idioms were experienced as opaque or transparent by the participants were carried out for the following reasons: (i) to assess the material used for testing for both this study and for future research which may make use of the material at hand; (ii) to categorize the idioms appropriately; and (iii) to

establish which idioms were experienced as opaque or transparent by the L2 group in particular.

The extent to which the participants experienced the idioms as opaque or transparent was tallied up amongst the participants of all three groups (cf. table 5.3). An idiomatic phrase or context was taken to be transparent if four of the six participants in each group had provided a correct answer. A context was taken to be exceptionally transparent if all six participants had supplied a correct answer. No related answers were tallied up in this instance.

Opaque and exceptionally opaque idiomatic phrases and contexts were identified according to the number of participants who gave either no response or an unrelated response. Restatements were not considered as a reflection of opacity; participants who restated the question, were prompted and if they did not elaborate further, their response was considered to be a literal interpretation. Literal answers were tallied up in the same manner as the transparent and opaque idioms. For the ENG group, only the four participants who were able to translate sufficiently were included in the results tabulated below.³⁶

Table 5.3. Opacity and transparency; adult ratings and participants' experiences

Idiom no	Adult ratings ^a	SLI	AFR	ENG	Matches in all 3 groups
1a ^b	2	L ^d	L		
1b ^c	2			T ^e	
2a	3	O ^f			
2b	2	O		T	
3a	5	O ^{*g}	O [*]	O [*]	O
3b	2	T	T		
4a	E			T	
4b	2	T	T	T	T
5a	5	O	O	O [*]	O
5b	2				
6a	4	L			
6b	2				
7a	3	O		O	
7b	1				
8a	3	L		O	
8b	2			O	

³⁶ Appendix C provides the idioms and contexts experienced as transparent, opaque and inciting literal interpretations.

9a	1	L		L	
9b	1				
10a	4	O	L	O	
10b	2		T	T	
11a	5	O	L	L	
11b	3			L	
12a	3			T	
12b	2				
13a	3	L		O	
13b	1				
14a	4	O*	O	O	O
14b	2	T	T	T	T
15a	5			O	
15b	1	T	T	T	T
16a	5	O		O	
16b	2				
17a	4	O*		O	
17b	3			T	
18a	5	O	O	O	O
18b	2			L	
19a	5	O*		O	
19b	2	T		T	
20a	4	O*		O	
20b	2		T		
21a	3	L	L	L	L
21b	2	O			
22a	5	O	O		
22b	2				
23a	3			O	
23b	2	T	T	T	T
24a	5	O	O	O	O
24b	2		T	T	
25a	4	O		O	
25b	2		T	T	
Totals		SLI	Afr	Eng	Matches
Opaque (a)		12	6	17	4
Opaque (b)		1	0	2	0
Transparent (a)		0	0	2	0
Transparent (b)		6	9	10	4
Literal (a)		6	4	3	1
Literal (b)		0	0	1	0

^aAdult ratings were based of the scale of 1 – 5 given in chapter 3 section 3.5. ^ba=idiomatic phrase (i.e., no context provided). ^cb=idiom in context. ^dL=literal interpretation; ^eT=transparent; ^fO=opaque; ^g*=answer unanimous amongst all six participants.

The ENG group experienced two of the idiomatic phrases as transparent as opposed to the other two groups who did not experience any of the idiomatic phrases as transparent. These two were: *Geld groei nie op my rug nie* and *As die kat weg is, is die muis baas*. Context aided the ENG group significantly, to the same extent as the AFR group. From the totals in table 5.3, it would appear that context proved to be less

beneficial for the SLI group. This is contrary to what was found based on the difference between the SLI group's scores for idiomatic phrases and idioms in context, discussed in chapter 4, section 4.4., hypothesis 6. One reason for this discrepancy could be the criteria used to assess the extent to which context benefited comprehension: In chapter 4, the conclusion drawn for the SLI group was based on the difference between actual performance scores and is here based on negative and positive answers.

5.6. Classification of the idiomatic phrases

5.6.1. Previous comparative studies

The definitions used to categorize the idioms for this study were based on previous studies by Charteris-Black (2002) and Laufer (2000), but were altered slightly for three reasons in particular: (i) the studies consulted used adults as subjects, therefore several categories were not deemed entirely applicable to children; (ii) there was no ambiguity stemming from cultural differences; and (iii) there are few typological differences between Afrikaans and English.

Deignan, Gabrys and Solska (1997) suggested four categories by which figurative language could be compared across languages. Charteris-Black (2002) elaborated on this model and proposed the following six categories by which comparisons could be made: (i) an equivalent linguistic form³⁷ and an equivalent conceptual basis; (ii) similar linguistic form and equivalent conceptual basis; (iii) similar linguistic form but different conceptual basis; (iv) completely³⁸ different linguistic form but shared conceptual knowledge originating in common encyclopaedic knowledge. No literal translation possible at surface level, but there is shared conceptual knowledge; (v) idioms which have completely different surface forms and completely different conceptual bases but are transparent, i.e., neutral knowledge; and (vi) figurative phrases that have a completely different conceptual basis in both languages and are opaque to even L1 speakers of that language (Charteris-Black 2002:115-117).

³⁷ "Linguistic form" here refers to both syntax and semantic similarities or differences.

³⁸ A word such as "completely" was deemed too strong a description due to the typological similarities between Afrikaans and English.

Charteris-Black (2002) conducted a comparative study using these categories which examined the interpretation of figurative language between English- and Malay-speaking individuals at a tertiary level. Due to an apparent shortage of literature on the interpretation of Afrikaans idioms by English speaking children, Charteris-Black's study, although it dealt with learners at tertiary level, nevertheless serves as a reference and makes points relevant to the present study. Again, Charteris-Black's study also looked at the two languages from a cultural perspective, and Malay and English are also less closely related than Afrikaans and English.

Laufer's (2000) article proposes four categories under which idioms can be classified. These four categories are (i) total formal similarity – idioms which have exact equivalent translations both grammatically and metaphorically; (ii) partial formal similarity, which includes idioms which have partial translation equivalents both grammatically and metaphorically, (iii) lack of formal similarity – idioms which express the same meaning in both languages but are grammatically different; and (iv) distributional differences, which include idioms which do not have idiomatic expressions in the language to which it is being compared (Laufer 2000:186).

Both Charteris-Black and Laufer's categories suffice as far as proficient adult L2 speakers are concerned, as such speakers have grasped the concept of figurative language and would have a repertoire of idioms in their L1 to refer to. There are subtle changes which were deemed necessary when applying these categories to child L2 speakers. Since semantic saliency and compositionality are prominent factors employed by children in interpreting figurative language (as opposed to referring to a repertoire of idioms in their L1) there appears to be a need to distinguish between idiomatic similarities and differences between English and Afrikaans and the interpretation of figurative meanings irrespective of the language.

When categorizing the idioms, "idiomatic similarities" will refer to those Afrikaans idioms which have exact or similar linguistic and conceptual counterparts in English. "Idiomatic differences" will refer to those Afrikaans idioms which have a similar linguistic form to an English idiom, but a different meaning. Non-idiomatic similarities/ "equivalent figurative meanings" will refer to the notion that, post translation, one is able to deduce as much information from the translation as from the original idiom. No "different figurative

meanings” were deemed applicable to this study due to the typological similarities between English and Afrikaans and because there is no cultural factor at play altering the connotations or associations of words (consult for example Charteris-Black 2002).

Further comparisons of idiomatic and linguistic similarities between Afrikaans and English idioms were investigated, as already addressed in sections 5.3 to 5.5 where findings were inconclusive concerning participant 9CENG. However, semantic analyses and phonological transfers were also deemed worth investigating as methods employed by the L2 participants in order to draw meaning as opposed to focusing on idioms as a genre per se.

5.6.2. The categorization of the idiomatic phrases in the present study

There are of course several ways in which idioms can be classified. The idioms in this study though were classified (i) according to their linguistic form (ii) their idiomatic similarities³⁹ and differences or equivalent figurative meanings and (iii) how they were experienced by the L2 speakers. Degrees of familiarity, opacity, transparency and abilities to perform translations also became apparent when classifying the idioms.

The categories used in this study for the classification of the idiomatic phrases as experienced by the L2 participants are as follows:

- Type (i.a) - an equivalent linguistic⁴⁰ form and an equivalent figurative meaning. Generally experienced as transparent;
- Type (i.b) - an equivalent linguistic form and an equivalent idiomatic meaning. Experienced as opaque;⁴¹
- Type (ii.a) - similar linguistic form and an equivalent idiomatic meaning. Generally experienced as transparent. Similar equivalent English idioms are also supplied in bold below the literal translation;
- Type (ii.b) - similar linguistic form and an equivalent idiomatic meaning. Generally experienced as opaque. Similar equivalent English idioms are also supplied in bold below the literal translation;

³⁹ Since this section examines semantic saliency, only those English idioms which had semantic similarities to the Afrikaans idioms were listed and not linguistically different English idioms with equivalent meanings.

⁴⁰ "Equivalent linguistic form" refers to those idiomatic phrases which are able to be translated into English without altering the word order.

⁴¹ Opaque here also refers to not only an inability to gauge meaning but also an inability to translate successfully.

- Type (iii) - similar linguistic form but different idiomatic meaning. Generally experienced as opaque;
- Type (iv) - different linguistic form but shared figurative meaning. Idioms categorized under this category require advanced ontological knowledge. Experienced as opaque;
- Type (v) – similar or exact linguistic form and equivalent figurative meaning. Generally experienced as opaque or inciting literal interpretations;
- Type (vi) - different linguistic form but equivalent figurative meaning. Experienced as opaque;
- Type (vii) – no translations are possible. Generally experienced as opaque.

Type (iii) is included as a category, even though it seems to contradict the arguments in the preceding paragraphs stating that, due to children’s lack of knowledge of idioms, such categories were not deemed as relevant. Type (iii) was nevertheless included and should be acknowledged to examine whether the participants had likened a relatively similar linguistic idiom with a different conceptual basis to the L1 language.

The responses of all six ENG participants are supplied below the idioms. Participants 8AENG and 10BENG had the idioms translated for them by the researcher. Plausible figurative interpretations produced by the participants are italicised in the tables below, where the participants’ train of thought or source of reference was evident thus highlighting a conceptual ability to infer meaning from the idiom or an ability to make reference to ontological knowledge, even if the answer was incorrect.

Even if the idiom was translated correctly, the child was not always able to supply an interpretation for it, but they were prompted to be clear on their final answers. Not all the children translated the idioms but inherently responded with an answer.

Table 5.4. Type (i.a) an equivalent linguistic form and an equivalent figurative meaning. Generally experienced as transparent.

Idiom no.	Idiom	L2 participant	
1	Hy is ‘n bobbejaan.	9AENG	He is a Barbie.
		9BENG	He has gone crazy.
	He is a baboon/monkey.	9CENG	It means that someone is silly.
		10AENG	<i>He is a monkey. It means that he behaves badly.</i>

		8AENG	I think it means that you can swing around trees.
		10BENG	He is a fool.

Table 5.5. Type (i.b) - an equivalent linguistic form and an equivalent idiomatic meaning. Experienced as opaque.

13	Slaan die spyker op die kop.	9AENG	Hit the nail on the head.
		9BENG	-
	Hit the nail on the head.	9CENG	-
		10AENG	-
		8AENG	Be careful of the nail.
		10BENG	Stop being naughty.

Phonological transfers often misled participants. For example, *Hy is 'n bobbejaan* was translated as *He is a Barbie* which ultimately became more indecipherable. An equivalent linguistic form such as *Slaan die spyker op die kop* and *Hit the nail on the head* was surprisingly not able to be translated nor were correct interpretations provided.

Table 5.6. Type (ii.a) - similar linguistic form and an equivalent idiomatic meaning. Generally experienced as transparent. Similar equivalent English idioms are also supplied in bold below the literal translation.

Idiom no.	Idiom	L2 participant	Translations and interpretations by L2 speakers
4	Die geld groei nie op my rug nie.	9AENG	Money doesn't grow on me. I don't have enough money for this.
		9BENG	The money does not grow on my back. It means that it can't grow on my back.
	Money doesn't grow on trees.	9CENG	Money doesn't grow on my back. It doesn't just grow and grow. It means he doesn't just get money.
		10AENG	The money doesn't grow on my back. Stop asking for stuff.
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
12	As die kat weg is, is die muis baas.	9AENG	If the cat's away, the mice will play. When then cats are gone, the mice will come out and play and be boss.
	When the cat is away, the mouse is boss.	9BENG	When the cat is gone, the mouse is happy. He can get something to eat.
		9CENG	It means when the people aren't there it means that the other person is in charge.

	will play.	10AENG	That means that when the cat is away, the mice will play. That means that when the adults are away we can do lots of naughty stuff.
		8AENG	When the cat is away, it won't chase the mouse.
		10BENG	-

The number of accurate answers provided for these two idioms may be attributed to the linguistic (vocabulary) similarities, the transparency of the idioms and or the fact that similar idioms exist in the English language with which the children were familiar. As seen with idiom number 1, table 5.4, it may be that children respond well to the characteristics/ stereotypical behaviour of animals. Animals are an example of a subject that one would deem to be of great interest to most children and within their frame of reference. Only idiom number 12 was likened to the equivalent English idiomatic expression by two participants.

Table 5.7. Type (ii.b) - similar linguistic form and an equivalent idiomatic meaning. Generally experienced as opaque. Similar equivalent English idioms are also supplied in bold below the literal translation.

Idiom no.	Idiom Afrikaans and English	L2 participant	Translations and interpretations
17	Sy draai almal om haar vinger. She turns everyone around her finger. She has everyone wrapped around her finger.	9AENG	She does everyone up. She doesn't like anybody.
		9BENG	-
		9CENG	It means she was cross.
		10AENG	<i>She thinks she is cool.</i>
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	<i>She thinks she is God.</i>
19	Iemand oor die kole haal. To take (haul)⁴² someone over the coals.	9AENG	-
		9BENG	-
		9CENG	Someone stole the coals.
		10AENG	Taking someone off the coals. <i>The person is in charge.</i>
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	Pick up the coals.
25	<i>Aan iemand se</i>	9AENG	On somebody's lips to hang.

⁴² It was not expected that children of this age group would translate the word *haal* into *haul* but rather *take*.

	<i>lippe te hang.</i>	9BENG	To hang on someone's lips.
	<i>To hang on someone's lips.</i>	9CENG	-
		10AENG	<i>You're scared.</i>
		8AENG	-
	<i>To hang on their every word.</i>	10BENG	-

Although there are linguistic similarities, syntactically the idioms listed in type (ii.b) are slightly more complex. The idioms also range on a continuum of those which are more or less linguistically similar. Children of the age group dealt with were not familiar with the idioms listed above in either language. This category produced the largest number of plausible figurative interpretations. There is no apparent reason for this occurrence.

Table 5.8. Type (iii) - similar linguistic form but different idiomatic meaning. Generally experienced as opaque

Idiom no.	Idiom	L2 participant	
18 Experienced as opaque/ induced literal interpretation by all three groups	'n Kat in die sak koop.	9AENG	A cat in the bag buys.
	To let the cat out of the bag.	9BENG	A cat in the bag. When I go to the pet shop and I want a cat, the cat is in the bag.
		9CENG	To buy a cat in the bag. It means to do the right thing because you buy a cat in the bag.
		10AENG	-
		8AENG	-

Since both L1 groups found this idiom to be opaque, it was not likely that the L2 group would then liken it to the linguistically similar idiom in their L1, but nevertheless it was included as a category.

Table 5.9. Type (iv) - different linguistic form but shared figurative meaning. Idioms categorized under this category require advanced ontological knowledge. Experienced as opaque.

Idiom no.	Idiom	L2 participant	
16	Agteros kom ook in die kraal.	9AENG	-
	The last ox also	9BENG	-

	comes into the kraal.	9CENG	-
		10AENG	-
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-

Vocabulary such as *agteros* and *kraal* proved to be beyond that of the participants, but this was often found to be the case with even the L1 speakers. The word *kraal* also exists in the English Webster's unabridged dictionary. It is of course questionable whether idioms are the most suitable forms of figurative language to use when assessing children's comprehension of figurative language, as some idioms require not only ontological knowledge but also etymological or historical information which needs to be learnt (Grant and Bauer 2004:51). The word *kraal* meaning "an enclosure made of branches where animals are kept" was, for example, beyond the frame of reference of these participants.

Table 5.10. Type (v) – similar or exact linguistic form and equivalent figurative meaning. Generally experienced as opaque or inciting literal interpretations.

Idiom no.	Idiom	L2 participant	
6	Ek is nie onder 'n kalkoen uitgebroei nie. I wasn't born under a turkey.	9AENG	I'm not born from a turkey. I don't look like a turkey.
		9BENG	-
		9CENG	You are not born out of an egg.
		10AENG	It means that I am not stupid.
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	I'm not fat or anything.
9	Ek kan slange vang. I can catch snakes.	9AENG	I can catch snakes.
		9BENG	I can catch snakes.
		9CENG	I can catch snakes.
		10AENG	I can catch snakes. It means you are very good at it.
		8AENG	I can catch a snake with like a net or...
		10BENG	I can catch snakes.
10	Hulle bak en brou net soos hulle wil. They bake and brew just as they want.	9AENG	-
		9BENG	-
		9CENG	They can bake as much as they like.
		10AENG	They are doing exactly what they want.
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
11	Ons ry met Jan Tuisbly se karretjie.	9AENG	We ride with Jan Tuis's little car.
		9BENG	We ride on... I never knew that name.
		9CENG	They drive with someone else's car.

	We ride with Jan Tuisbly's car.	10AENG	You are riding with someone else's car.
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	We ride with his car.
14 Experienced as opaque by all three groups	Sy skiet met spek. To shoot with bacon.	9AENG	She shoots bacon.
		9BENG	She shoots with bacon.
		9CENG	-
		10AENG	<i>It means that she is bragging.</i>
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
15	Slaan voet in die wind. Hit your foot in the wind.	9AENG	Hit the foot in the wind.
		9BENG	The foot is sleeping in the wind.
		9CENG	-
		10AENG	<i>Hurry up.</i>
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
21 Literal interpretation amongst all three groups	Hy eet alles vir soet koek op. He eats everything as if it were sweet cake.	9AENG	He eats everything just for cake.
		9BENG	He eats all the cake.
		9CENG	He ate everything up. There was nothing left for the others.
		10AENG	He eats everything that is sweet cake.
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
22	Lekker is maar 'n vingerlank. Something nice is only as long as a finger.	9AENG	A sweet is a finger long. *Lekker can also mean something that is nice. ⁴³ It means the mom is a finger nice. My mom is a finger long.
		9BENG	-
		9CENG	Something nice is as long as your finger. If you doing something nice, it is not very long, but the things you don't like are usually longer.
			-
		8AENG	Liquorish.
		10BENG	-
23	Die koeël is deur die kerk. The bullet is through the church.	9AENG	The bullet is passed the church. <i>Church is over quickly.</i>
		9BENG	The bullet hit the church.
		9CENG	-
		10AENG	The bullet went through the church means that it went inside the church then went outside the church
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-

⁴³ An asterisks indicates instances where the researcher explained or translated a word for the child if their original interpretation was incorrect.

24 Experienced as opaque by all three groups	Die huis staan in ligte laaie.	9AENG	The house stands in light sunrays.
		9BENG	The house is lit by the light, no lights or candles, only the sun.
	The house stands/ is standing in light/ empty drawers.	9CENG	It means there is lots of light in it.
		10AENG	<i>The house stands in empty draws. It was boring.</i>
	8AENG	-	
	10BENG	-	

Those idioms with more linguistic similarities were easier to translate, but at times also encouraged/ enhanced literal interpretations.⁴⁴ This too was the case with the L1 speakers, where some of the more transparent idioms received literal answers. A possible explanation would be that linguistic simplicity/ familiarity and in the case of the L2 speakers, linguistic similarities are not experienced as “foreign” to the child and are therefore deemed acceptable answers. Levorato and Cacciari (1999) and Cain et. al. (2001) also found semantic analyses made by younger children led to more literal interpretations.

The argument that L2 speakers first learn the literal meaning of words in their L2 prior to possible figurative meanings does not carry weight in the case of the age group of these L2 speakers, especially when compared to the L1 speakers whose abilities were not remarkably superior to those of the L2 speakers.

Table 5.11. Type (vi) - different linguistic form but equivalent figurative meaning. Experienced as opaque or inciting literal interpretations.

Idiom no.	Idiom	L2 participant	
5 Experienced as opaque by all three groups	'n Appeltjie met iemand te skil hê.	9AENG	An apple with somebody's skull.
		9BENG	-
	To have a small apple to peel with someone.	9CENG	-
		10AENG	-
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
8	Hy het die hasepad gekies.	9AENG	He chose the rabbit's path.
	He chose the quickest path.	9BENG	He chose the rabbit's bath and I don't know the rest. He chose the greatest path.
		9CENG	He chose the greatest path.

⁴⁴ The participants were asked to provide meanings for their translations, but were often convinced of their translations to be the actual meaning of the idiom. The answers presented in the tables are the final answers produced by participants.

	He chose the rabbit's path.	8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
		10BENG	-

Again, the occurrence of a phonological transfer such as *skil*, meaning “peel”, was translated as *skull*, leading to further ambiguity. Afrikaans idioms which were less linguistically similar to English, were understandably more awkward to translate. *Hasepad* was heard/ interpreted as *The rabbit's path/ bath*. This is also understandable considering the level/ type of vocabulary children are familiar with.

Table 5.12. Type (vii) – no translations possible. Generally experienced as opaque.

Idiom no.	Idiom	L2 participant	
2	Sy is 'n agie.	9AENG	-
		9BENG	-
	She is an/ a (no literal translation possible).	9CENG	-
		10AENG	-
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
3 Experienced as opaque by all three groups	Hy is in sy noppies.	9AENG	-
		9BENG	-
	He is in his (no literal translation possible)	9CENG	-
		10AENG	-
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-
7	Die hele dorp was in rep en roer.	9AENG	-
		9BENG	-
	The whole town was in (no literal translation possible)	9CENG	I think it means there were a lot of people walking around and it is difficult to get through.
		10AENG	The whole town was ...
		8AENG	-
		10BENG	-

Idioms 2, 3, and 7 are idiomatic expressions which are not easily semantically decomposed. *Die Verklarende Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* (HAT) only relays the words *noppies*, *agie* and *rep en roer*⁴⁵ as they exist in their idiomatic form, therefore explaining why so few responses were given.

⁴⁵ *Rep en roer* here is considered to be one phrase which cannot be directly translated into English but has a similar meaning as the English expression *hustle and bustle*. The word *rep* can mean to *mention*, but is often associated with the word *roer* in the dictionary – the definition being “confusion, movement, stir” (Readers Digest Dictionary 1999:436). *Roer*, on the other hand, has several possible meanings, one of which is “stir” (Readers Digest Dictionary 1999:440).

5.7. General findings regarding the comprehension of the Afrikaans idioms by the L2 participants

It was considered to be a possibility that those Afrikaans idioms, numbers 4, 12, 13, 17, 19 and 25 which were semantically and/or syntactically very similar to their English idiomatic counterparts could possibly be experienced as more transparent than others or likened to their English counterparts. However, it was found that, of the idioms likened to those which appear in the English language, only the Afrikaans idiom number 12 was likened to the equivalent/ similar English idiom (cf. table 5.8) by two out of the four participants, and were generally experienced as transparent by the others. When participants likened the Afrikaans idiomatic phrases to the English equivalents, they had done so without prompting or request to do so and it was their first response as opposed to translating the Afrikaans idiomatic phrases directly into English.

The prediction made regarding the possibility that the L2 speakers may have fared better on certain Afrikaans idioms likened to similar ones in the English language was, therefore, not borne out by the data obtained from the L2 speakers in this study. This may also be due to the small sample size.

Even though there are studies which have found semantic transparency and analyzability to aid correct interpretation (Gibbs 1987; Nippold and Taylor 2002), other studies have reported semantic analyses to lead to literal interpretations (Levorato and Cacciari 1999 and Cain et. al. 2001). The L2 participants in this study frequently gave literal interpretations for those idioms which were linguistically equivalent or similar to English in terms of grammatical translations. Initially, it was thought that translating the idioms and their contexts into their mother tongue might bring clarity or perhaps deter participants from providing literal answers but it seems that, at times, such translation had the opposite effect. Evidently, the translations of the idioms proved to be just as perplexing as the Afrikaans idioms, often due to incorrect phonological transfers. This finding is attributed to a lack of proficiency in Afrikaans, a general inability to comprehend figurative language and/or the extent to which a translation was possible.

Relaying the idioms with appropriate intonation aided the participants to decipher its meaning. For example, participant 10AENG supplied a correct answer for the idiom

Hulle bak en brou net soos hulle wil. When asked how he knew the correct answer, he responded by saying, “It just sounded like that.” Responding to intonation would seem to illustrate a well developed socio-pragmatic ability. Rhyme schemes have also been reported to aid children’s interpretations of figurative language (Yopp 1988).

No one participant displayed a greater ability to produce plausible figurative meanings than others. The production of plausible figurative answers shows creativity and a potential awareness of the non-literal. Syntactic awareness was not as well developed as semantic awareness in the translations made by the L2 speakers, proving semantic saliency to be the most prominent factor for children, but particularly for L2 speakers. It would seem that the researcher’s translations did not benefit participants 8AENG and 10BENG; in fact, it appeared as though those participants who made the translations themselves were more engaged with the task at hand.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1. Pedagogical implications and recommendations

There appears to be a positive relationship between idiom understanding and academic performance (Nippold and Martin 1989). Norbury (2004) states that understanding the mechanisms needed for idiom/figurative language comprehension is essential for the development of intervention and teaching strategies for language-impaired children. Considering the role of language in idiom comprehension, language development should be given more attention, to a greater or lesser degree, in both typically developing and language-impaired children to foster development. Norbury (2004) proposes that children need to be actively taught how to deduce meaning from context.

From a pedagogical perspective, areas of focus in order to aid a child's figurative language competence require a broadening of vocabulary and the encouragement of reading. Since semantic saliency is a pertinent factor for children concerning the comprehension of idioms, those idioms which are semantically decomposable should be introduced first. Since idioms require a higher degree of cognitive sophistication than what similes do (Malgady 1977:1), similes suffice as a basic introduction to the concept of metaphor. Similes relate figurative associations between sensory modalities and adjectives (Douglas and Peel 1979:116) and are also less complex in terms of grammar. What the results for similes in this study did illustrate, regardless of whether or not the participants gave the correct answers befitting the actual simile, was that they were able to produce an appropriate answer, which sufficed as a display of metaphorical ability. This was present amongst all groups.

From the results obtained from the SLI participants in the present study, it would seem as though educators may prove to be successful with much the same suggested pedagogical techniques as those suggested for typically developing groups in introducing figurative language, provided that it is at a level which is suitable and introduced at an appropriate age with sufficient repetition. Yet again, this may differ amongst language-impaired individuals according to the severity of their impairment.

The comprehension of figurative language can be enhanced by explaining where the ideas of figurative language stem from, especially by using simple analogies with emotionally charged subjects applicable to children (Vosniadou 1987:874).

6.2. Limitations of this particular study

The limitations of this research project have been noted throughout the findings. In summary, they are the following:

- (i) The SLI group should have been grouped according to their receptive and expressive language abilities rather than their general diagnosis.
- (ii) The typically developing groups should have been required to have identical reading scores for both their L1 and L2 languages, thus eliminating the potential cognitive benefits some children may have gained from their bilingual status.
- (iii) In order to have doubled the results concerning figurative language comprehension in the bilingual child, tests on English idioms and similes might have been administered to the L2 ENG group, namely the L1 Afrikaans speakers.
- (iv) In order to increase the generalizability of the results, larger sample sizes should have been used. The size of the typically developing groups were matched to that of the SLI group, for which it proved difficult to obtain suitable members.

6.3. Recommendations for future research on this topic

Since language and communication impaired children may have multiple clinical diagnoses and diagnoses which vary in severity, it may be advisable, for purposes of evaluation, to group children according to language abilities rather than clinical diagnoses (Norbury 2004). To assess language abilities, standardized pre-tests need to be administered in order to establish the level of their abilities.

The studies consulted for purposes of this study, and as reported by other researchers, state that drawing conclusions is complex, as the studies on the topic at hand vary in terms of populations examined, the degree to which the cognitive, linguistic and pragmatic abilities of the populations differ, and the idioms selected and methodologies used (Norbury 2004). There appears to be a need to standardize tests and

methodologies on this topic and for those tests and methods to be replicated amongst several population groups.

Further investigation might be done into bilingual children's comprehension of figurative language for those who speak both more or less typologically similar languages, either as separate groups or evaluating the same groups, which would amount to examining L1 and L2 transfer in third language figurative language acquisition. It may also be of value to examine and prompt children for further explanations to gain insight into online processing skills. It was not deemed fair unto the participants to note reaction times when considering child-internal variables, which may inhibit children in situations of testing, but it may be a factor worth including. This particular study would be of interest to replicate using girls as subjects.

6.4. Conclusion

In this study, the figurative language comprehension of three groups of children was compared. It was found that there were no statistically significant differences in the accuracy of the comprehension of Afrikaans idioms and similes by typically developing L1 speakers of Afrikaans, typically developing L2 speakers of Afrikaans (with English as L1), and L1 speakers of Afrikaans with SLI. The interpretation of similes was found to be easier than that of idioms. Also, it appeared that providing an idiom in context (as opposed to providing a "bare" idiomatic phrase) aided the comprehension by the SLI group more than it did that of the two typically developing groups. Although there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups in terms of the number of literal interpretations given for idioms, the SLI group did give a higher number of these interpretations than did the two typically developing groups.

The L2 speakers' translations did not aid their interpretations. There are several plausible reasons for this; a lack of proficiency in Afrikaans; a lack of familiarity with Afrikaans idioms; misleading phonological transfers through which meaning was obscured even further and or simply an inability to comprehend figurative language.

This study aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge on the comprehension of figurative language by children. Unlike many other studies on this topic, a minority

language (Afrikaans) was studied, a non-typically developing group of children were included (namely those with specific language impairment), and data were also obtained from non-L1 speakers with an L1 which is typologically similar to their L2. The findings of this study have implications for clinical and educational practice.

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Appendix A

Idioms

Idiomatic phrases (a)

Idioms placed in context (b)

The meanings of the Afrikaans idiomatic phrases are provided in English in italics below the Afrikaans idiomatic phrases.

1.a.) Hy is 'n bobbejaan.
He is stupid or silly.

1.b.) Jannie dink dat melk van Pick 'n Pay af kom en nie van 'n koei nie. Hy is 'n bobbejaan.

2.a.) Sy is 'n agie.
She is inquisitive.

2.b.) Elke keer as iemand vir Sannie iets sê, vra sy "Hoekom? Hoekom?" Sy is 'n agie.

3.a.) Hy is in sy noppies.
He is happy.

3.b.) 'n Seuntjie het baie presente gekry vir sy verjaarsdag, en nou is hy in sy noppies.

4.a.) Die geld groei nie op my rug nie.
Money does not come from nowhere. Money does not just appear. There is not enough money.

4.b.) 'n Seuntjie wil baie graag 'n baie duur speelding hê. Hy vra vir sy ma of sy dit vir hom sal koop, toe skud sy haar kop en sê, geld groei nie op my rug nie.

5.a.) 'n Appeltjie met iemand te skil hê.
To want to speak to someone about a serious matter.

5.b.) My pa het uitgevind dat ek sy motor gestamp het. Nou het hy 'n appeltjie met my te skil.

6.a.) Ek is nie onder 'n kalkoen uitgebroei nie.
I am not stupid.

6.b.) My broer sê vir my hy het eendag 'n pienk koei in ons tuin sien rond loop. Ek sê toe vir hom dat ek nie onder 'n kalkoen uitgebroei is nie.

7.a.) Die hele dorp was in rep en roer.

The whole town was busy.

7.b.) Die president van die land het 'n klein dorpie kom besoek en toe was die hele dorp in rep en roer.

8.a.) Hy het die hasepad gekies.

He ran away.

8.b.) Die seuntjie wou nie sy kamer aan die kant maak nie en toe sy ma met hom wou raas, het hy die hasepad gekies.

9.a.) Ek kan slange vang.

I am very angry.

9.b.) Die man se motor is gesteel en toe hy dit uitvind sê hy dat hy kan slange vang.

10.a.) Hulle bak en brou net soos hulle wil.

They do exactly as they please.

10.b.) Wanneer die ma uitgaan om inkopies te doen, los sy die kinders by die huis. Toe die ma terugkom sien sy die hele huis is 'n gemors. Toe sê sy vir die kinders julle bak en brou soos julle wil as ek nie hier is nie, nê.

11.a.) Ons ry met Jan Tuisbly se karretjie.

To stay at home.

11.b.) Een vrou sê vir die ander vrou; "oe, ons gaan lekker fakansie hou in Bloemfontein." Toe se die ander vrou; „oe, nee hierdie jaar ry ons met Jan Tuisbly se karretjie.“

12.a.) As die kat weg is, is die muis baas.

In the absence of supervision or authority, others do as they please.

12.b.) As my ma weg is, dan dink my broer hy kan vir my sê wat ek moet doen en dit maak my kwaad. Ek vertel toe vir my ma, maar sy lag en sê dat as die kat weg is, is die muis baas.

13.a.) Slaan die spyker op die kop.

To reach the correct conclusion.

13.b.) Pieter wou nie skool toe gaan nie. Hy jok toe vir sy ma en sê sy maag is seer. Later praat sy ma met sy pa. Sy sê “Moes Pieter nie vandag daardie goot wiskundetoets skryf nie? Mmm... so hy is miskien nie siek nie... hy wil net nie die toets skryf nie” Die pa sê “Ek dink jy slaan die spyker op die kop”.

14.a.) Sy skiet met spek.
To tell a lie.

14.b.) Chanel se ma sien hoe Chanel 'n lekkertjie steel. Chanel sê toe sy het NIE 'n lekkertjie gesteel nie. Haar ma sê toe: “Chanel jy skiet met spek.”

15.a.) Slaan voet in die wind.
To run away.

15.b.) Die dief is in die bank, skielik hoor hy die polisie sirenes en toe slaan hy voet in die wind.

16.a.) Agteros kom ook in die kraal.
To eventually complete a task.

16.b.) Uiteindelik het ek my werk klaar gemaak, toe sê die onderwyseres vir my agteros kom ook in die kraal.

17.a.) Sy draai almal om haar vinger.
To manipulate people.

17.b.) In die oggend vra die dogtertjie vir 'n lekkertjie van haar oupa en hy gee toe vir haar een. Daardie middag vra sy haar pa vir 'n pop, en hy koop vir haar een. Daardie aand vra sy haar ma vir nog 'n stukkie koek en haar ma gee dit vir haar. Toe sê haar oom vir haar ma, die dogtertjie draai almal om haar vinger.

18.a.) 'n Kat in die sak koop.
To unknowingly have purchased broken merchandise.

18.b.) My pa het vir my boetie 'n speelkarretjie gekoop, maar hy het nie die boks in die winkel oopgemaak nie. Toe hy by die huis kom, sien hy dat die karretjie gebreek is. My ma sê hy moet dit na die winkel terug vat, want hy het 'n kat in die sak gekoop.

19.a.) Iemand oor die kole haal.
To reprimand someone.

19.b.) Jannie skop aspris vir Sarel op die been. Die onderwyser sien dit, toe het hy Jannie oor die kole gehaal.

20.a.) Iets van die hand sit.
To sell something.

20.b.) My pa het twee fietse gehad toe besluit hy om een van die hand te sit.

21.a.) Hy eet alles vir soetkoek op.
To be gullible.

21.b.) As jy vir Jannie sê dat koeie kan vlieg sal hy dit vir soetkoek opeet.

22.a.) Lekker is maar 'n vinger lank.
When one is enjoying something, time passes very quickly.

22.b.) Betty het 'n heerlike tyd by haar vriendin se partytjie gehad, maar toe moes sy huis toe gaan. Betty besef lekker is maar 'n vinger lank.

23.a.) Die koeël is deur die kerk.
Damage has been done. Something is over and cannot be fixed.

23.b.) Eendag was my broer kwaad. Toe breek hy aspris my ma se mooiste blompot. Toe voel hy sleg en sê vir my ma dat hy dit wil regmaak. Toe sê my ma die koeël is deur die kerk.

24.a.) Die huis staan in ligte laaie.
The house is on fire.

24.b.) Die Smit-familie het gaan uiteet. Oppad terug huis toe, sien hulle brandweerwaens in hulle straat. "Wat gaan aan?" vra mev Smit. "Kyk", sê mnr Smit, "ons huis staan in ligte laaie!"

25.a.) Aan iemand se lippe te hang.
To listen attentively.

25.b.) Die juffrou lees 'n baie opwindende storie vir die kinders en hulle hang aan haar lippe.

Similes

- 1.) Iets is so groen soos... *gras*
- 2.) Iets is so rooi soos... *bloed*
- 3.) Iets is so stil soos 'n... *muis*

- 4.) lets is so wit soos... *sneeu/ wolke*
- 5.) lets is so stadig soos 'n... *skilpad*
- 6.) lets is so koud soos... *ys*
- 7.) lets is so maer soos 'n... *kraai*
- 8.) lets is so lig soos 'n... *veer*
- 9.) lets is so blind soos 'n... *mol*
- 10.) lets is so glad soos... *seep*
- 11.) lets is so dood soos 'n... *mossie*
- 12.) lets is so vinnig soos... *blits*
- 13.) lets is so sterk soos 'n... *leeu*
- 14.) lets is so siek soos 'n... *hond*
- 15.) lets is so vry soos 'n... *voël*
- 16.) lets is so lelik soos die... *nag*
- 17.) lets is so taai soos 'n... *ratel*
- 18.) lets het weggeraak soos 'n... *speld*
- 19.) lets waggel soos 'n... *eend*
- 20.) Hulle baklei soos... *kat en hond*
- 21.) Hulle het geld soos... *bossies*
- 22.) lets pronk soos 'n... *pou.*
- 23.) lets is so mak soos 'n... *hond/ 'n lam*
- 24.) lets bewe soos 'n... *riet*
- 25.) lets is so doof soos 'n... *kwartel*

Appendix B

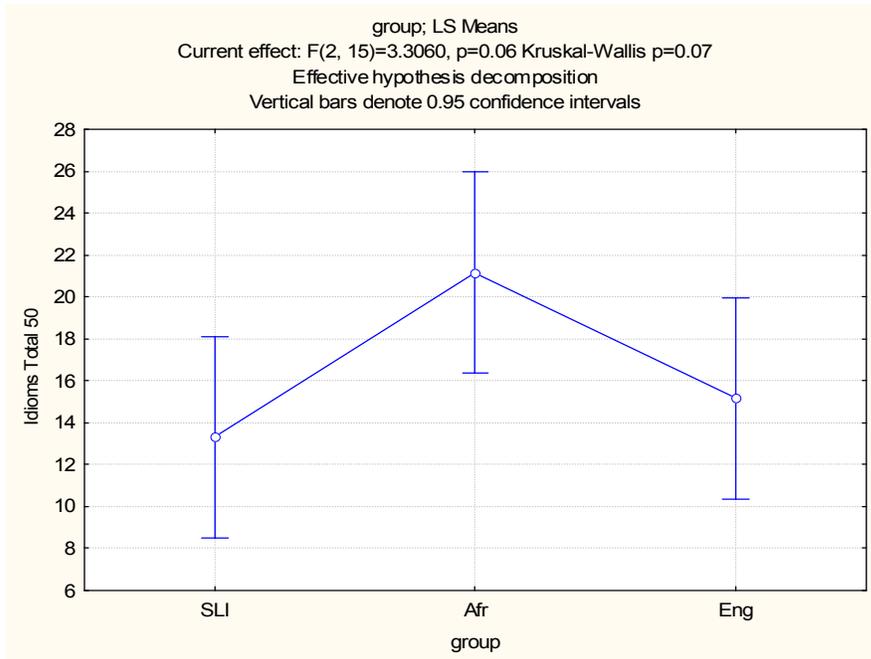


Figure b1. Statistical analysis of the idioms test (total 50)

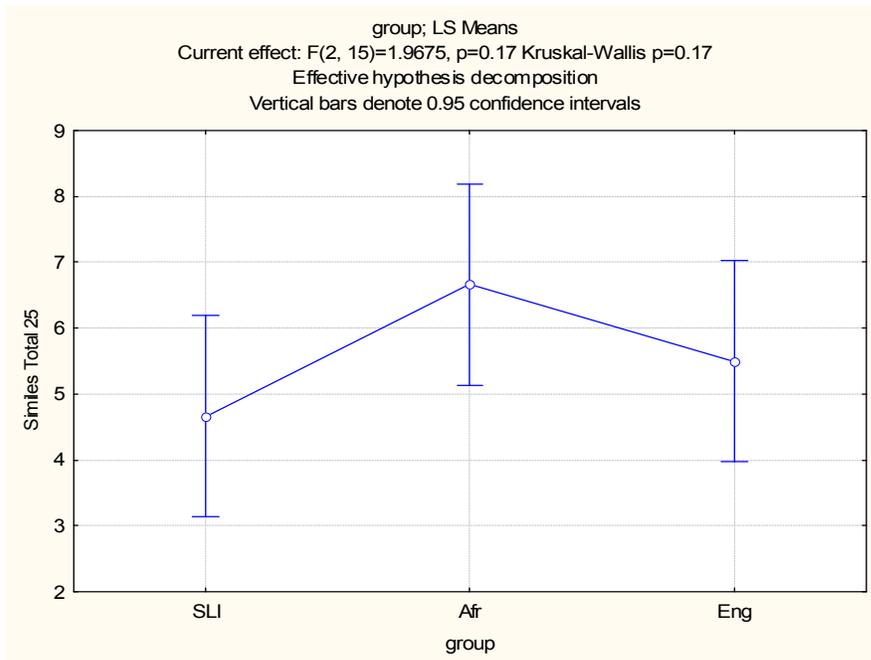


Figure b2. Statistical analysis of the similes test (total 25)

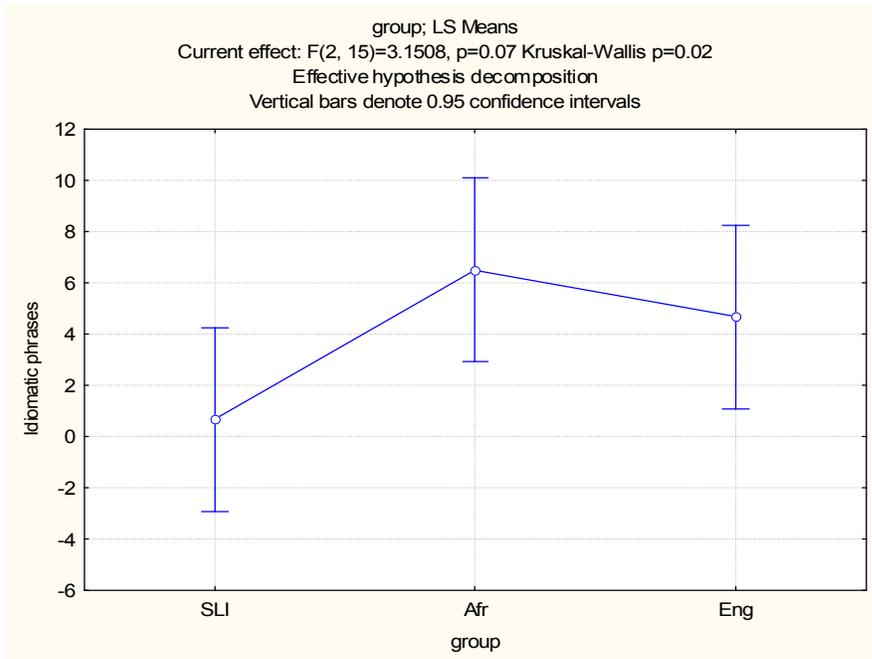


Figure b3. Statistical analysis of the idiomatic phrases (total 25)

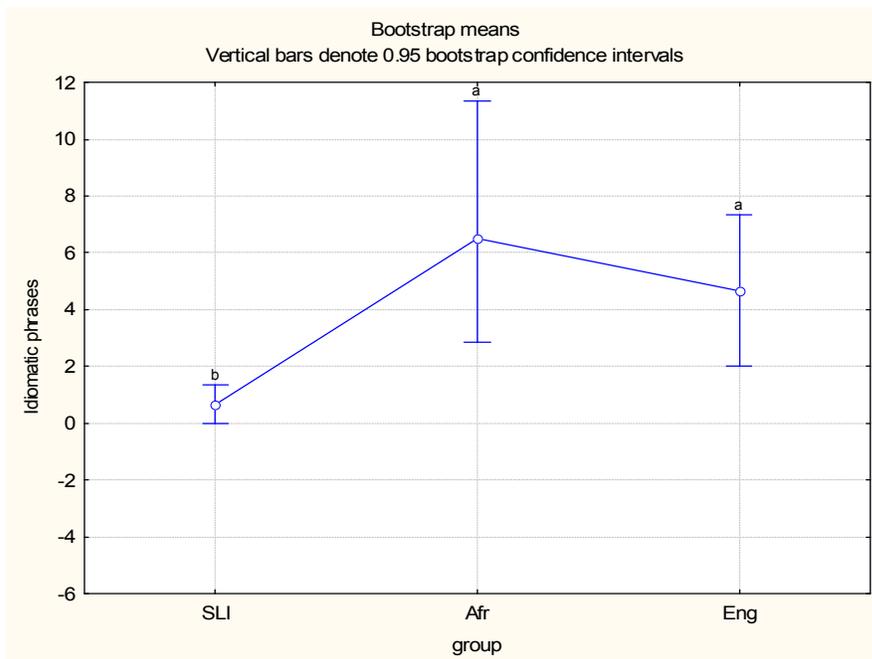


Figure b4. Bootstrap graph indicating confidence intervals

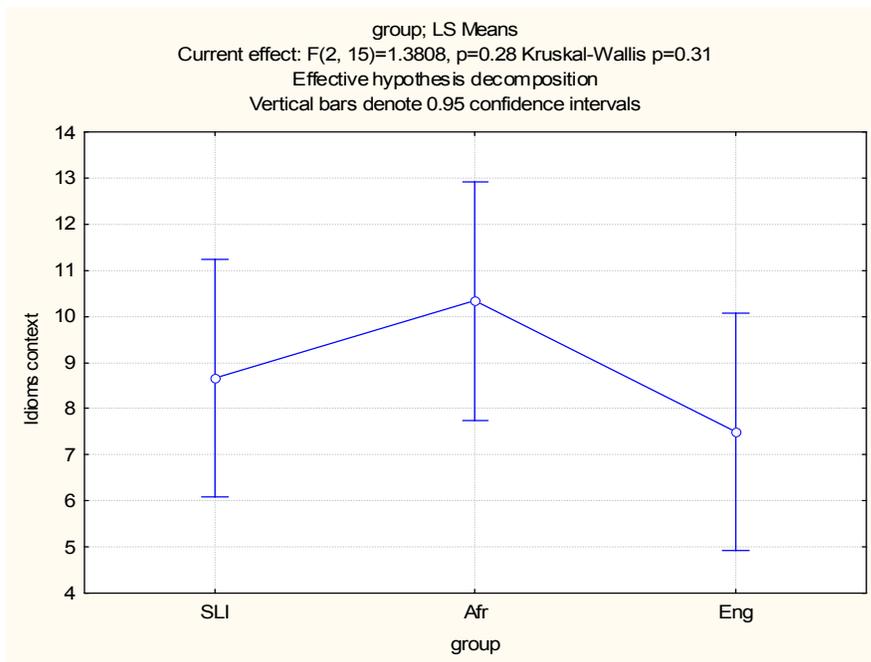


Figure b5. Statistical analysis of the idioms placed in context (total 25)

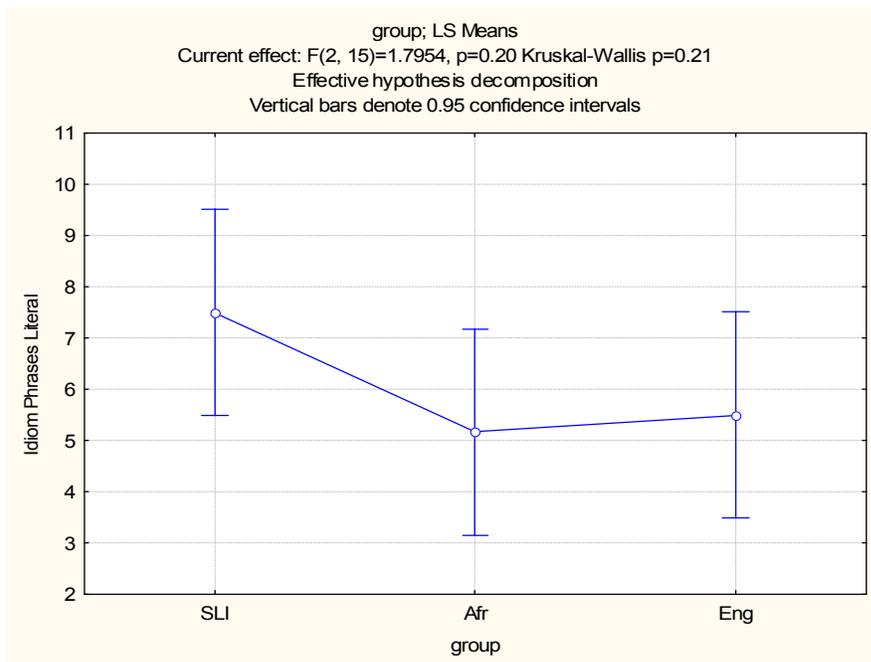


Figure b6. Statistical analysis of literal interpretations of idiomatic phrases (total 25)

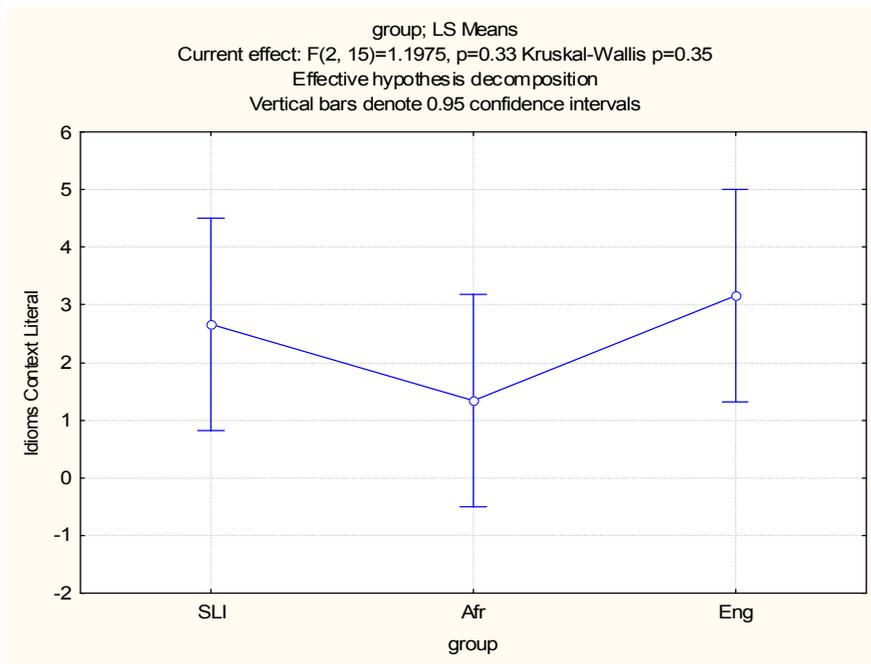


Figure b7. Statistical analysis of literal interpretations of idioms placed in context (total 25)

Appendix C

Idiomatic phrases and contexts provided in this appendix correlate with table 5.3 in chapter 5, section 5.5. The extent to which the participants experienced the idioms as opaque or transparent were tallied up amongst the participants of all three groups. An idiomatic phrase or context was taken to be transparent if four of the six participants in each group had provided a correct answer. A context was taken to be exceptionally transparent if all six participants had supplied a correct answer. No related answers were tallied up in this instance.

Opaque and exceptionally opaque idioms were identified according to the number of participants who gave either no response or an unrelated response. Restatements were not considered as a reflection of opacity; participants who restated the question, were prompted and if they did not elaborate further, their response was considered as a literal interpretation. Literal interpretations were also tallied in the same manner as the transparent and opaque idioms. For the ENG group, only the four participants who were able to translate sufficiently were included in identifying transparency and opacity.

Written in bold above the transparent and opaque idiomatic phrases and contexts, the two groups which experienced the idiomatic phrases and contexts as transparent or opaque are identified.

Transparent idiomatic phrases

No idiomatic phrase had correct answers given by four or more participants in each group.

Transparent contexts

SLI/Afr

3.b) 'n Seuntjie het baie presente gekry vir sy verjaarsdag, en nou is hy in sy noppies.

Afr/Eng

10.b) Wanneer die ma uitgaan om inkopies te doen, los sy die kinders by die huis. Toe die ma terugkom sien sy die hele huis is 'n gemors. Toe sê sy vir die kinders julle bak en brou soos julle wil as ek nie hier is nie, nê.

SLI/Eng

19.b) Jannie skop aspris vir Sarel op die been. Die onderwyser sien dit, toe het hy Jannie oor die kole gehaal.

Exceptionally transparent contexts

4.b)'n Seuntjie wil baie graag 'n baie duur speelding hê. Hy vra vir sy ma of sy dit vir hom sal koop, toe skud sy haar kop en sê, geld groei nie op my rug nie.

14.b) Chanel se ma sien hoe Chanel 'n lekkertjie steel. Chanel sê toe sy het NIE 'n lekkertjie gesteel nie. Haar ma sê toe: "Chanel jy skiet met spek."

15.b) Die dief is in die bank, skielik hoor hy die polisie sirenes en toe slaan hy voet in die wind.

23.b) Eendag was my broer kwaad. Toe breek hy aspris my ma se mooiste blompot. Toe voel hy sleg en sê vir my ma dat hy dit wil regmaak. Toe sê my ma die koeël is deur die kerk.

24.b) Die Smit-familie het gaan uiteet. Oppad terug huis toe, sien hulle brandweerwaens in hulle straat. "Wat gaan aan?" vra mev Smit. "Kyk", sê mnr Smit, "ons huis staan in ligte laaie!"

25.b) Die juffrou lees 'n baie opwindende storie vir die kinders en hulle hang aan haar lippe.

Opaque idioms

SLI/ENG

7.a) *Die hele dorp was in rep en roer.*

SLI/ENG

10.a) *Hulle bak en brou net soos hulle wil.*

SLI/ENG

16.a) *Agteros kom ook in die kraal.*

SLI/ENG

17.a) *Sy draai almal om haar vinger.*

SLI/ENG

19.a) *Iemand oor die kole haal.*

Exceptionally opaque idioms – All groups

3.a) *Hy is in sy noppies.*

5.a) *'n Appeltjie met iemand te skil hê.*

14.a) *Sy skiet met spek.*

18.a) *'n Kat in die sak koop.*

20.a) *Iets van die hand sit.*

22.a) *Lekker is maar 'n vinger lank.*

24.a) *Die huis staan in ligte laaie.*

Tendency for a literal interpretation

SLI/AFR

1.a) *Hy is 'n bobbejaan.*

Tendency for a pronounced literal interpretation – All groups

9.a) *Ek kan slange vang.*

11.a) *Ons ry met Jan Tuisbly se karretjie.*

21.a) *Hy eet alles vir soetkoek op.*

Since there were no opaque matches for idioms placed in context, it is assumed that the contexts provided were suitable for the age group concerned.