

*How idioms are learned:
an experiment to determine the type of
process involved in L2 idiom acquisition.*

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1 Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

Idioms have often been identified as shibboleths¹ when it comes to identifying non-native speakers of languages, including English. Second language learners (henceforth referred to as L2 learners) often show a poor knowledge of idioms because the lexicon and particularly idioms are not given much attention in the learning process. This is due to syntax usually receiving most attention. In keeping with this lack of attention given to idioms in the learning process, not much research has been done on how idioms are acquired or how they could best be taught.

In the study of L2A (second language acquisition) it is commonly assumed that language learning is driven by two different types of learning mechanisms; gradual learning or pattern recognition mechanisms and linguistic pattern recognition mechanisms. The former can be involved in any kind of learning, while the latter is used in linguistic pattern recognition in L1A. This linguistic pattern recognition mechanism is often referred to as Universal Grammar (UG).

It is widely assumed that this pattern recognition mechanism does not initiate the correct output immediately after having received grammatical input, but rather shows two periods of information acquisition. In the first period, the pattern will not have been recognized yet and output results will depend solely on chance. At some point, which is dependent on the markedness of the item, UG will recognize the pattern and start applying it. During the second period, the pattern will be used by UG to determine the output results. This type of learning process is typically believed to be found in grammar acquisition, since that is the area in which the UG is active.

It then follows logically that if the learning process is not UG-driven, the learning process of curve will be different since regular gradual learning will be applied. This learning curve will only show one period of gradual improvement because UG will not be able to recognize and process the pattern. When this is the case, the learner has to obtain the pattern through active learning instead of UG pattern recognition. This type of learning process is typically believed to be found in the learning of lexical items.

Since it is yet unclear whether idioms are acquired through UG-driven or non-UG-driven acquisition, this study will focus on determining this. The way in which this will be tested is through teaching participants a grammatical item, which is acquired through a UG-driven learning process, a lexical item, which is acquired through a non-UG-driven learning process, and an idiomatic item, of which the acquisition type is yet unknown. The participants will be tested at several time intervals and the results will be compared to see whether the learning

¹ According to the Webster dictionary, the definition for *shibboleth* is any distinguishing practice that is indicative of one's social or regional origin. It usually refers to features of language. This meaning of the word is derived from a passage from the Bible: "...and whenever Ephraimite fugitives said, 'Let me cross,' the men of Gilead would ask, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' If he said, 'No,' they then said, 'Very well, say "Shibboleth".' If anyone said, "Sibboleth", because he could not pronounce it, then they would seize him and kill him by the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites fell on this occasion." —Judges 12:5-6, NJB

process of idioms shows more resemblance to the learning process of grammar or lexicon. This will enable us to identify the learning process of idioms as either UG-driven or non-UG-driven.

As an additional experiment, passivization of the idioms will be tested to determine further whether UG influences grammatical choices when idioms are part of the phrase. The participants will be asked to passivize the sentences containing phrasal-, non-phrasal, or no idioms, but to do so only if passivization is possible. If this choice is UG-driven, i.e. if the participants will have acquired the knowledge that passivization is a grammatical transformation that some idiom types can undergo while some other types cannot, the participants will correctly choose whether or not to passivize the given sentences. If, however, this choice is not UG-driven, then they will not. Since the results of this can be determined through one occurrence instead of a learning process, the passivization experiment will only need to be done once.

1.1.1 What is an idiom?

To be able to use the right materials for this study, we first need to determine which idioms will be used. To do this, we need to identify clearly what an idiom is. Nunberg, Sag & Wasow (1994) confirm that the term 'idiom' is applied to many types of word clusters other than idioms, including but not limited to collocations, fixed phrases, proverbs, sayings, and allusions.

Collocations are phrases in which one word is combined with a certain other word very often, such as *surge of N* (for instance: *anger*). While the use of other words is not grammatically wrong (like *rush of anger*), they are not used. A fixed phrase is considered an extended collocation, where the choice of words is up 100% predictable, as in *like clockwork*. Neither *like*, nor *clockwork* can be replaced without the phrase losing its figurative meaning. This phrase only carries this meaning in this exact setting. However, although it carries some, but very little, figurativeness, it should not be considered an idiom. Proverbs are common-sense 'words of wisdom' which carry little to no figurative meaning, such as *don't count your chickens before they're hatched*. Sayings are like proverbs, but more widely-known. An example of a saying is: *where there's smoke, there's fire*. An allusion is a reference to a well-known object, event, or person without mentioning its meaning directly. The only extra meaning it carries is not figurative, but rather the meaning the object of reference carries. An example could be a character in a book being described as "another Helen", in which the reference is to Helen of Troy.

Nunberg, Sag & Wasow also identify several factors that are shared by many word clusters that are typically called idioms. These factors are conventionality, inflexibility, figuration, proverbiality, informality, and affect. They also mention that although all of these properties can apply to idioms, none of these, except for conventionality, should obligatory be applied to what we call idioms. For example, some idioms do not have a literal meaning, but yet they are called idioms. However, when such a fixed expression lacks many of these properties, the chances of it being considered an idiom decrease.

These properties are often combined in a definition such as the one Kiparsky (1976) proposed. Kiparsky proposes an idiom to be defined as a set of words that "has no relation between the meanings of the parts and the meaning of the whole from the viewpoint of synchronic structure." Grant and Bauer (2004) also proposed two criteria to determine whether a word chunk should be considered an idiom or not: non-compositionality and figurativeness. Figurativeness here stands for a large degree of figurative meaning carried by phrases, chunks, or individual words that only exists when these phrases, chunks, or individual words are used in a

specific setting, but which is not based on historical knowledge (thus *red herring* is non-figurative).

These two criteria are also mentioned by Nunberg, Sag & Wasow and are considered the most important indicators by Grant and Bauer. Grant and Bauer, however, identify figurativeness not as determining whether or not it is an idiom, but as identifying the type of idiom. Grant (2006) then composed a list of three different types of idiomatic multiword units using the two criteria noted above, which is displayed in Figure 1.

Let's first explore the idiom types; core idioms are non-compositional and non-figurative

1. core idioms (non-compositional, non-figurative)

• *by and large, so and so, red herring*

2. figuratives (non-compositional, figurative)

• *take the plunge, keep a low profile, go off the rails*

3. ONCEs (one non-compositional element, may also be figurative)

• *a long face, take its toll, at stake*

and an example is *by and large*. The second idiom type is non-compositional and figurative, such as *go off the rails*. The third and last idiom type in Grant's model is called ONCE; one non-compositional element, which may or may not be figurative, such as *a long face*, in which *long* is the non-compositional element and *face* is the literal part.

Since the present study is focused on determining the learning curve for idiomatic meaning acquisition in idioms, idioms that have both a literal and an idiomatic meaning will be used. Moreover, by using these types of idioms, it can also be ensured that

Figure 1

the participants will not be able to identify the idioms as being the main priority of the experiment, since there is another, literal, meaning the participants can apply to the idioms.

Since core-idioms are non-figurative, this type of idioms will not be used in the present study. To ensure the phrasal or non-phrasal element can become significant in the passivization experiment, ONCE idioms will not be used. This is because ONCE idioms consist of one non-compositional element in an otherwise regular phrase and are thus by definition phrasal. Thus, the present study will work with figurative idioms.

Moreover, because the present study will compare both idioms used in the passivization experiment, it is desirable that two idioms that look syntactically alike will be used. So two idioms that look alike of which one is a phrasal idiom, or frozen (Gibbs, 1989), and the other a non-phrasal idiom, should be used. The present study will then be able to determine whether passivization choices are UG-driven or not through the passivization experiment, since phrasal idioms can be passivized and non-phrasal idioms cannot.

In search of these idioms, *kick the bucket* was selected as the phrasal, or frozen, idiom. Since it is not possible to distribute the idiomatic meaning over the parts of the expression (i.e. we cannot say *kick* receives some meaning and *the bucket* another, and combined they mean 'to die'), this is a phrasal idiom. This correlates with the idiomatic phrase being unable to go through any grammatical transformations without losing its idiomatic meaning, making it a frozen expression (Gibbs, 1994).

Let the cat out the bag, however, differs from *kick the bucket* in both of these matters. Since the figurative meaning of the idiom can be distributed over some of its parts (i.e. we can say *the cat* carries the idiomatic meaning of *the secret*), this is a non-phrasal idiom. *Let the cat out of the bag* thus differs from *kick the bucket* in that it is not fixed and can thus undergo grammatical transformations, such as passivization, without losing its idiomatic meaning.

Both of these idioms are figurative idioms; that is to say, both have a figurative meaning as well as a literal meaning. The difference in both meaning application possibilities is then

defined through grammatical transformation options, such as passivization, as illustrated in (1) through (4). In the following sentence pairs, a shows the sentence in which the idiom is used, where b and c are the possible idiomatic and literal meanings that could be assigned to the sentence mentioned in a. As can be seen in (1) and (2), both the figurative and the literal meaning of *kick the bucket* can be assigned to (1a), but only the literal meaning can be assigned to (2a), because this is a passive sentence and *kick the bucket* is a non-phrasal idiom. The reason why the passivization causes *kick the bucket* to lose its idiomatic meaning is because the passive form acquires its meaning on a lexical level. Since *kick the bucket* is a phrasal idiom, and no chunks of idiomatic meaning can be assigned to separate lexical chunks of the idiom, the only type of meaning can that be derived in the passive is a non-idiomatic meaning. *Kick the bucket* will thus receive the non-idiomatic, literal meaning when passivized (Nunberg, Sag & Wasow 1994).

As can be seen in (3) and (4), both the figurative and the literal meaning of *let the cat out of the bag* can be assigned to (3a) as well as (4a). This is because *let the cat out of the bag* is a non-phrasal idiom and the idiomatic meaning can be assigned on a lexical level and can thus be acquired when passivized.

- (1) a John kicked the bucket.
b John hit the bucket with his foot.
c John died.
- (2) a The bucket was kicked by John.
b John hit the bucket with his foot.
c * John died.
- (3) a John let the cat out of the bag.
b John allowed the cat to get out of the bag.
c John shared the secret.
- (4) a The cat was let out of the bag by John.
b John allowed the cat to get out of the bag.
c John shared the secret.

1.1.2 A quick view of the participants

The participants will be selected on the basis of several criteria. The first is that they have some knowledge of English, but are not of such high level of proficiency that it is likely for them to have already been in contact with the idioms that will be used in the present study. This is to ensure they will be able to properly and proficiently acquire the items that will be taught to them during the present study, while being sure all they will be taught is new to them.

While all children in the Netherlands receive some formal pre-high school English education, there is a large school-to-school difference in the organization of this education, and it is thus not advisable to use participants who have not completed the pre-high school education. Due to the amount and level of English education increasing quickly as children progress through high school, the most ideal participants will thus be first-year students of high school. To ensure all students are of the same learning level, all students selected to participate will be at a HAVO² level. Moreover, to further make the group of participants as homogenous as possible,

² HAVO stands for *hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, or *higher general continued education*) which is the intermediate level of high school teaching in the Netherlands. The level system consists of VMBO (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs* or *preparatory mid-level vocational training*), HAVO and VWO (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs* or *preparatory academic education*).

students with first languages (henceforth referred to as L1s) that differ from Dutch, or who have an L2 that is different from English, will be excluded as well.

Since the present study will be analyzing a learning curve, any anomalies in this learning process will be eliminated to ensure the learning curve results will not be influenced by anything other than the teaching and the individual students' acquisition. Thus, students who have missed one or more teaching classes or tests will be excluded from the analysis. Moreover, a control question will be added to post test 1, and students who are unable to answer this question correctly will be excluded from analysis.

To ensure a large amount of participants, three full HAVO 1 classes will be used for the present study. One entire class will be used to study the phrasal idiom, another the non-phrasal idiom, and a third will function as a control group and not be taught anything.

1.1.3 The items to be taught

The idioms to be used in the present study will be *kick the bucket* and *let the cat out of the bag*, and the grammatical and lexical items to be used will be discussed in this section. As with the idioms, it is imperative that these items are unknown to the participants, but yet not too hard for them to acquire. The Garden Path Method (to be discussed below) will be used as a teaching method, and this requires the items to be taught to have a set of clear general rules, as well as exceptions.

As the grammatical item, the that-trace effect qualifies. It is not too hard to learn, but yet unknown to first-year high school students, and it has clear rules and exceptions.

An example of the teaching exercise used is shown below. As seen in (1a) and (1b), the students will be given examples of sentences where *that* is optional. They will be asked to devise the general rule, which at this point seems to be that *that* is always optional. They will then be shown (4a) and (4b), which indicate that sometimes, including *that* makes the sentence ungrammatical. To ensure students will have to think about the answer in the test and not be able to give correct answers by always excluding *that*, they will be shown (6a) and (6b). The sentence testing them on this knowledge will function as a control question and if students fail to answer it correctly, they will be excluded from the experiment.

- (1) a Who did you say John saw?
b Who did you say that John saw?
- (4) a Who did you say saw John?
b * Who did you say that saw John?
- (6) a * The building collapsed belongs to Mary.
b The building that collapsed belongs to Mary.

As a lexical item, the word *curious* was chosen. Again, it meets both criteria for being able to be taught using the Garden Path Method; it has a clear general rule and an exception. It will also not be taught to the students until several years after the first year of high school, yet it is not too hard for the first-year students to acquire. Examples of teaching exercise sentences are shown below.

- (1) a I am very curious about astronomy. I'd like to know all about the stars.
- (2) b Look, there's a man standing outside your house. Does he visit often?
- That's my uncle and he never visits us. That's curious...

From sentence (1a) can be concluded that *curious* generally means 'inquisitive', while the exception can be learned from (2b), in which *curious* means 'odd'.

1.1.4 The Garden Path Teaching Method

However interesting it would be to test which teaching method is most useful for teaching idioms, in the present study this would pose another variable and thus possibly interfere with the results. The present study therefore chose one teaching method to teach all three test items with; The Garden Path Method as developed by Tomasello & Herron (1988). This method is chosen because the present study is looking to analyze a learning curve and a clear and effective teaching method is thus the best way to teach the items to the participants. The Garden Path Method presents this type of learning as it actively involves the learners in the learning process. This happens through encouraging them to process the material actively through asking them to establish common rules for a phenomenon of which they are given examples in class.

The full teaching setup and target elicited responses for all taught items can be found in the Appendices. In the above section, examples of the teaching exercises for the grammatical and lexical item were shown. In this section, the full exercise for the idiomatic item *kick the bucket* will be shown and explained.

As can be seen in (1), several examples of the use of *kick the bucket* are shown to the participants. From this set of sentences they are encouraged to conclude the idiom means 'to die'. They are also shown that different tense forms are allowed. However, to show them the specific meaning of the idiom, more examples need to be given.

- (1) a We didn't expect him to die so soon, but my uncle Steve kicked the bucket last night.
 b My grandma is preparing her will, in case she kicks the bucket.
 c I wouldn't want to know when I will kick the bucket, even if I could.

The students will now form the general, yet overgeneralized rule, that *kick the bucket* means 'to die'. They will also see that different tense forms are allowed.

From the examples shown in (2), the participants can conclude that *kick the bucket* means not only 'to die', but 'to die suddenly'.

- (2) a Whereas grandpa John died after being sick for a long time, my other grandpa, Martin, simply kicked the bucket.
 b I wouldn't want to live with many medical conditions when I'm old; then I'd rather kick the bucket and have it over with.

From (2), students will gather the information that *kick the bucket* does not merely mean 'to die', but rather 'to die suddenly'.

The sentences in (3) are examples given to the students to elicit the processing of anaphora and passivization properties. The participants will be shown that the idiomatic meaning is not assigned to *kick the bucket* when it is used in an anaphoric construction. The target process is for the students to acquire two aspects. The first is the knowledge that *kick the bucket* is a non-decompositional idiom. The second is that non-decompositional idioms are not assigned idiomatic meanings when used in anaphoric and passive sentence constructions.

- (3) a * My friend's cousin Ron kicked the bucket, and his aunt kicked it too.
 b * At the same time my grandparents kicked the bucket, my husband kicked it too.

From (3), the students will acquire the knowledge that the idiom *kick the bucket* is not assigned any idiomatic meaning when used in an anaphoric setting. It will then only be assigned its literal meaning, which is 'to hit the bucket with your foot' and not mean 'to die suddenly'. The target process, to be tested in the passivization subtest, is for the participants to also acquire the knowledge that the idiom *kick the bucket* loses its idiomatic meaning when passivized, because

both passivization and anaphora are grammatical processes that *kick the bucket* cannot undergo without losing its idiomatic meaning.

1.2 Experimental hypothesis

As mentioned in the general introduction (1.1), the goal of the present study is to determine the linguistic learning process involved in phrasal- and non-phrasal second language idiom acquisition. This research question has been formed based on the theory that linguistic information can be processed either through a UG-driven or a non-UG-driven process. The theory states grammatical linguistic items are acquired through a UG-driven process and lexical items are learned through a non-UG-driven process. The type of learning process involved in learning lexical items is thus regular gradual learning, which is not limited to linguistic learning. Another theory suggests that idioms can be classified by the frozenness of the item (Fraser, 1970). The frozenness is based on the degree of traditional transformations that can be applicable to the item.

When these theories are combined, the present study's theory is formed, which is that the type of learning process depends on the degree of frozenness. If a linguistic item is very, or completely, frozen, then no grammatical transformations can be applied to it. This means UG does not need to be activated, the item receives very little grammatical markedness, and the learning process activated to acquire this item will be a general, gradual, non-UG-driven process. The theory also includes that linguistic items that are very non-frozen, or compositional, thus to which very many grammatical transformations can be applied, receive a lot of markedness and the acquisition of these items will be through a UG-driven process.

This means, that in line with this theory, the experimental hypothesis for the present study is that the frozen idiom will be learned through a non-UG-driven process and the compositional, or non-phrasal, idiom will be acquired through a UG-driven process. The hypothesis for the passivization test will be that the students will acquire the knowledge that both anaphoric constructions and passivization are grammatical transformations, which can either both be applied or both not be applied to the idiom presented to them. Thus the hypothesis is that the participants will know that passivization is possible for the non-phrasal idiom (*let the cat out of the bag*), but not possible for the phrasal idiom (*kick the bucket*).

2 Subjects/Participants

The experiment was conducted with the help of three first year classes of students at HAVO level in high school. They made a total of 75 students of which 24 were a control group. All students were born in the Netherlands and were learning English in high school after having had one or two years of prior simple English lessons in secondary school. The mean age of all children that participated was 12 years and 7 months at the day of the first meeting, ranging from 11 years and one month to 13 years and 10 months.

The two experimental groups, with a combined total of 55 students, consisted of 31 male and 24 female students. The control group consisted of 18 male and 6 female students. As mentioned before, several exclusion criteria were used. The first was to ensure English was the participants' L2 and Dutch was their L1. This caused a total of twelve students' results to be excluded from the data analysis. Moreover, students who did not attend all research classes were also excluded, causing another twelve students to be excluded from analysis.

To test whether or not the students who were in the experimental groups had been paying any attention during the first research class, a simple control question was added to the second test. Students who did not answer this control question correctly were also excluded, causing another seventeen students to be ineligible for analysis. The mean age of the remaining students in the experimental groups, a total of 19 students (13 male and 6 female), was now 12.57 years. The mean age of the control group, which also consisted of 19 remaining students (14 male and 5 female), was now 12.48 years. The male/female ratio is 2.2 for the experimental group and 2.8 for the control group.

3 Design & Procedure

The experiment consisted of four meetings with a test each. The meetings were distributed as follows: the first two meetings were no more than two days apart, the third meeting took place after a resting period of at least thirty days, and the fourth two weeks after that.

The tests were given in a test environment: all students were sitting at least 50 cm apart from each other and were completely silent until all tests had been completed and collected. To ensure students would not gain anything from peeking at their neighbor's sheet, three different versions of each test were distributed. Moreover, the students were told the test results would not have any effect on their English grade, hopefully further lowering their inclination to cheat.

All teaching was done using the Garden Path method as developed by Tomasello & Herron (1988) and modified by Pots (2008). This means the students were taken through a specific process for each item to be learned. It started with showing them several sentences from which the general rule could be constructed. The students were asked to come up with this rule themselves, and they were never explicitly told the rule by the teacher; they were merely acknowledged in having found the correct rule when they did. They were then shown a series of sentences from which the exceptions to the general rule could be constructed. Again, they were encouraged to come up with hypotheses until they had correctly given the revised rule. This process (of which an example for *kick the bucket* has been given in the 1.1.4, The Garden Path Method section) was repeated for each item to be learned.

The first meeting was started by teaching the students how to form a passive structure. After that, the students were given the first test, the pretest. After this test, for which they were given fifteen minutes to complete, the experimental groups were taught the grammatical item, their idiom, and the lexical item. Both experimental groups were taught a different idiom: one was taught *kick the bucket*, a phrasal idiom which cannot be passivized, and the other was taught *let the cat out of the bag*, a non-phrasal idiom for which passivization is possible. Since passivization and anaphoric structures are both grammatical transformations which are either possible (i.e. for non-phrasal idioms) or not (i.e. for phrasal idioms), the students were taught that the non-phrasal idiom can be referred to anaphorically and the phrasal idiom cannot. During the pretest, as well as during post test 1 and 2, which will be discussed below, the participants were tested on whether they acquired the knowledge that anaphoric structures are grammatical transformations, just like passivization is, and thus both types of transformations are either possible or not, or whether they simply acquired the knowledge whether anaphoric constructions were possible or not. The control group was not taught anything and was only subjected to the tests.

During the second meeting, the students were first given the second test, post test 1. This test consisted of the same questions and test items as the pre test, except now one grammatical item had been replaced by a control item for all groups. After this test, for which the students were again allowed fifteen minutes, they were given non-study related English work to do.

The third meeting was started by teaching the students how to passivize again, to ensure the results for the passivization section would be accurate and not depend on (a lack of) knowledge of passivization itself. After that, the students were given the third test, post test 2. After the test, they were briefly shown the examples from the lessons again and asked if they could still remember the rules.

At the beginning of the fourth meeting, the students were given the final test, post test 3, which did not have a passivization section and thus only entailed choosing the right answers in a multiple-choice environment. The students were only given seven minutes for the test this time.

The tests the students were subjected to consisted of two sections. The first section included three types of questions, namely three questions regarding grammar, three questions regarding idioms for both non-control groups and six for the control group, and three questions regarding the lexical item (see Figure 3 below).

The main experiment consisted of one type of experimental test; a multiple choice fill-in-the-blank task. Examples of this test are shown in Figure 3 below. The participants were asked to perform this task for all three types of items taught to them during the experiment. The experimental groups were tested on the grammatical and lexical items, along with one of each type of idiom. The control group was tested on the grammatical and lexical items and both types of idioms. The following was given to the students as a written explanation of the multiple-choice section of the tests, as shown below in Figure 2.

Are these sentences correct? If not, choose from the phrases or words to the right to make the sentence grammatical. If the sentence is grammatically correct already, then choose the blank space. You can choose by marking the correct choice with an x. The chunks or words can only be added at the blank space in the sentence. Only add something when it's necessary! If you choose to add something when it's not necessary to make the sentence grammatical, your answer will be considered wrong.

Figure 2

As can be seen in Figure 3, all items were tested in separate sentences, each with one or more words replaced by '...'. Behind each sentence, four options were given to fill the blank, of which three were phrases or (chunks of) words and one was a blank space. The students were told that choosing one of the three phrases or words meant they thought that needed to be added to the sentence to make it correct and choosing the blank space meant they thought the sentence was correct as it was and nothing needed to be added to make it correct. They were also told that choosing a phrase or word when it was not necessary to make the sentence correct would be considered a wrong answer.

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|--|
| The building ... collapsed belongs to my father. He won't be happy when he finds out. | who | his | that | |
| I have always been ... about languages. Now that I am in University, I can finally quench my thirst. | in love | twice | curious | |
| I was very sad when my grandmother suddenly ... the bucket. She had always been very nice to me. | kicked | hung | died | |

Figure 3

The tests consisted of three items for each task, with a total of nine test items for the experimental groups and twelve for the control group. The only difference between the tests of the two non-control groups was the idiom they were tested on. One of the experimental groups was taught and tested on the phrasal idiom, and the other was taught and tested on the non-phrasal idiom.

The control group was given the same test as the experimental groups, except they were tested on both idioms and were thus given three test questions on each of the two idioms, making

a total of six idiom items and a total of twelve items per test. This part of the tests consisted of multiple-choice questions.

In Figure 3, the first test sentence is: "The building ... collapsed belongs to my father. He won't be happy when he finds out." The "..." indicate the test area, in which the students were asked to insert either one of the three words ("who", "his", or "that"), or the blank space. This test sentence is the control question the students were given during post test 1, since it contains the control sentence for the grammatical item for which "that" is not optional but required. Any student who answered this questions incorrectly, was excluded from the study. As can be seen from Figure 3, this test sentence does not relate to the that-trace effect. It does, however, serve to determine whether or not the students have paid attention during the explanatory part of the study, since this sentence type was used as an example during the explanation of the grammatical item.

The second sentence is an example of a question addressing the participants' knowledge of the lexeme. The students were again shown a sentence with a blank space: "I have always been ... about languages. Now that I am in University, I can finally quench my thirst." Again, they were asked to choose between either one of the three word chunks, or the blank space.

The third sentence in Figure 3 is one of the test sentences for one of the idioms, *kick the bucket*: "I was very sad when my grandmother suddenly ... the bucket. She had always been very nice to me." Again, there were three different words and the blank space to choose from.

The first three tests also had a passivization section so students could be tested on their idiomatic passivization property acquisition. This part consisted of seven regular sentences which the students were asked to passivize if possible. An example of such a test sentence is shown in Figure 4 below.

Mark saw Sarah at the gym last Friday. (was seen)

Figure 4

The following was given to the students as a written explanation of the passivization section of the tests, as shown below in Figure 5.

Now try passivizing the following sentences! (Only the ones you think are possible without changing the meaning.) Focus on the correct tense (grammar) and spelling! The form of the verb that can be used is in brackets behind the sentence. Write the answers at the other side of this paper.

Figure 5

All instructions were also verbally explained to the students.

The sheet also included a brief section in which the students were asked some information about themselves. These questions included their names, dates of birth, whether they were male or female, if and how long they had had English class before this year and whether or not Dutch was their first learned language and English their second, see Figure 4.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Student number: | Date of birth: | jongen/meisje |
| Have you been taught English before this school year? Yes/no. If so, specify: | | |
| Do you speak more languages than Dutch and English? Yes/no. If so, specify: | | |

Figure 4

4 Materials

In Figure 5 below the lesson plan which was used for the grammatical item; the that-trace effect can be seen.

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Grammar – that-trace effect: | |
| 1 | |
| a) | Who did you say John saw? |
| b) | Who did you say that John saw? |
| 2 | |
| a) | Who does he say he talked to? |
| b) | Who does he say that he talked to? |
| 3 | |
| a) | I wonder who he believes he saw. |
| b) | I wonder who he believes that he saw. |
| → Overgeneralized rule: that is always optional. | |
| 4 | |
| a) | Who did you say saw John? |
| b) * | Who did you say that saw John? |
| 5 | |
| a) | Who does he say talked to him? |
| b) * | Who does he say that talked to him? |
| → Revised rule: that is optional, except when the 'who' at the start of the sentence is the subject. | |
| 6 | |
| a) * | The building collapsed belongs to Mary. |
| b) | The building that collapsed belongs to Mary. |
| → Rule adjusted again: that is optional, except when the 'who' at the start of the sentence is the subject. When that refers to a non-personal (=relative) pronoun subject (so: not 'who'), it is required. | |

As can be seen in Figure 5, sentence 1) through 3), the option to form the overgeneralized rule is given first. This overgeneralized rule will be that "that" is always optional.

Second, from sentences 4) and 5) can be seen which information was given to the students to elicit the formation of the revised rule. From these sentence pairs, the students will conclude that "that" is optional, unless the "who" at the start of the sentence is the subject, in which case the use of "that" is prohibited.

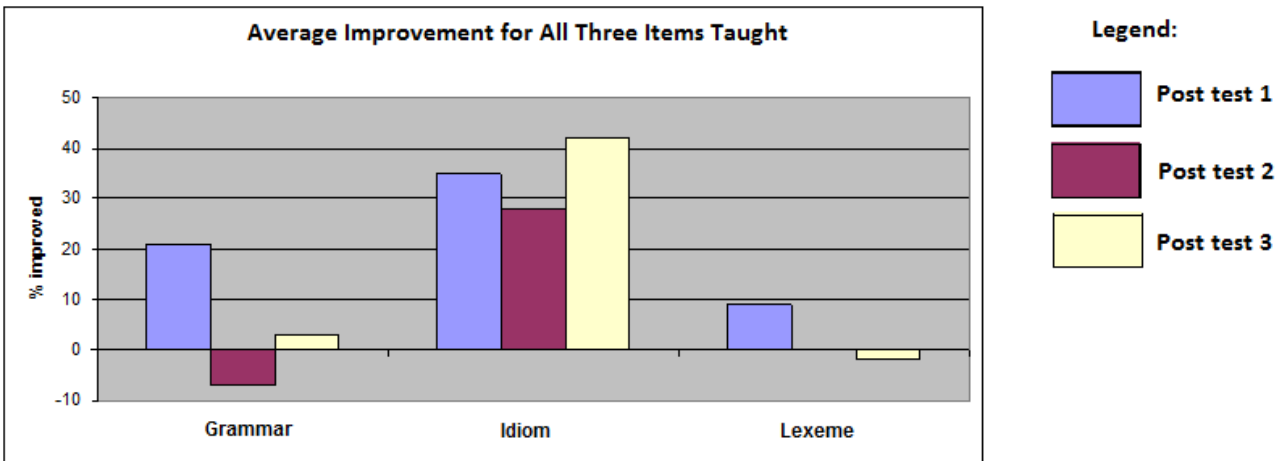
To show the students that simply not using "that" in any of the sentences presented to them will yield a correct answer, they were again shown additional sentences. The sentence pair in 6) shows that "that" is required instead of optional when it refers to a non-personal pronoun subject.

Figure 5

All lesson plans and corresponding projector sheets shown and used to the participants can be found as appendices.

6 Results

Graph 1 displays the average improvement in % of correct answers per item taught and subcategorized in post test 1, 2, and 3. The only item for which the students continued to improve throughout the post tests, is the idiom.



Graph 1

Unfortunately, forcing the students to complete the passivization exercise during post test 2 did not yield any results consistent with the hypothesis. Only three children chose not to make the sentence “Evelyn’s grandpa kicked the bucket last night” passive, one of which was in the control group. It would seem that, even though they did acquire that anaphora for this idiom could not be made, the information that idiomatic meaning could not be assigned to the passive sentence either was not acquired. It is unlikely that children did not know they could ‘skip’ sentences, since they did this regularly, mentioning ‘it could not be done’.

7 Discussion of Results

As can be seen in Table 1, the children did make their choices based on something other than chance after they had been taught something about the three items. From Table 1 can be concluded that, as the students progressed through the lessons, their choices started to become less chance-based and more based on their knowledge. From the probability values for groups A and B for the pre-test, which is 0.61, can be concluded that the chance on these results is very high and thus groups A and B based their answers for the pretest on chance. This means all improvement they made, as shown by the p-value decreasing as the students progress through the tests, was due to specific and conscious choices the students made and no longer based on chance.

| Test | pre test | post test 1 | post test 2 | post test 3 |
|---------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| P-value | 0.61 | 0.58 | 0.22 | 0.06 |

Table 1, p-value of overall results for groups A and B: comparing the experimental groups.

For post test 1 one specific item scored very low on the p-value, meaning the students had already started making choices based on what they had learned. This occurred for the grammatical item, which can also be seen in Graph 1. Sadly enough, this increase in percentage of correct answers did not continue and the students even answered less questions right for the grammatical item during post test 2. An explanation for these results may be that the students having processed the information the correct way after the first lesson, showing they have acquired the correct rules. After this, they may have further added information to this rule, causing it to become wrong. This could explain why the students scored very well on the grammar item in post test 1, but showed decreasing amounts of correct answers from this test onwards.

The p-values for groups A and B for the idiomatic item for post test 2 and post test 3 are near zero, indicating that this is clearly an item for which the students have made their choices based on knowledge instead of chance.

| Test | pre test | post test 1 | post test 2 | post test 3 |
|---------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| P-value | 0.54 | 0.002 | 0.0004 | 0.03 |

Table 2, p-values of overall results for groups A+B combined and group C: comparing the experimental groups with the control group.

From Table 2 can be concluded that, after the pre test – which was taken before any lessons were given and thus could only have been based on chance – the results are based on what the children have learned and not on chance. One odd number can found, however, in the p-value of the results for groups A+B combined and group C for post test 3. The p-value for these results is 0.03, which is not a high number, but also not low enough to support a non-chance based theory. A reason for this could be that the students were no longer interested in scoring well by the time of the fourth test and did not think about their answers and thus gave answers that were more based on chance than before. However, considering the minor difference, this may very well be due to a single student losing interest.

Below are Tables 3 through 6. The numbers show the average percentage of correct answers per test (pre test, post test 1, 2, and 3) and the number in brackets is the standard error, which is a measure of the amount of consistency among the students.

| Group | N | G | L | I |
|-------|----|------------|--------|--------|
| A | 7 | 22(11) | 39(13) | 33(9) |
| B | 12 | 38 (17) | 42(9) | 31(10) |
| A + B | 19 | 33(6) | 41(7) | 31(7) |
| C | 19 | 30(5) | 30(6) | 33(6) |

Table 3, Average percentage correct answers per group for pre test

As can be seen in Table 3 above, neither the results for group A and B, nor the results for group A + B and group C do not differ much. This indicates, again, that they all had the same amount of knowledge, which is none. As seen in Table 1 at the beginning of this section, these results are largely based on chance, which, along with the fact that the tests consisted of multiple choice questions with three possible answers per question and the average percentage correct is exactly 33%, can be used to conclude that the students did not have any knowledge before the lessons started.

| Group | G | L | I |
|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| A | 62(9) | 52(10) | 57(16) |
| B | 47(5) | 44(8) | 67(10) |
| A + B | 53(5) | 47(6) | 63(8) |
| C | 23(5) | 49(7) | 39(6) |

Table 4, Average percentage correct answers per group for post test 1

Table 4 shows much improvement for the grammatical item, little for the idiomatic item and none for the lexical item. Even though the average percentage correct for the questions related to the lexical item increased from 35% to 48%, this increase occurred among all groups and thus does not indicate the students in groups A and B having learned anything. Rather, it indicates the students had probably remembered some of the questions and/or were getting more familiar with the way in which the tests were conducted and were thus able to answer more questions correctly despite not having learned the proper rule yet.

| Group | G | L | I |
|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| A | 38(13) | 43(12) | 86(7) |
| B | 28(7) | 39(9) | 78(6) |
| A + B | 31(6) | 40(7) | 81(5) |
| C | 28(4) | 35(7) | 46(6) |

Table 5, Average percentage correct answers per group for post test 2

Table 5 indicates a large increase of percentage of questions answered correctly for the idiomatic item and little to no difference from the results of the control group for the grammatical and lexical item. This may indicate a gradual increase in knowledge of the idiomatic item, since a small increase of correct answers was also found in the previous test.

| Group | G | L | I |
|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| A | 38(11) | 38(5) | 91(6) |
| B | 28(6) | 36(9) | 64(10) |
| A + B | 31(5) | 37(6) | 74(7) |
| C | 30(6) | 26(6) | 53(6) |

Table 6, Average percentage correct answers per group for post test 3

Again, Table 6 shows little to no improvement for the grammatical and lexical item, and, for the first time, no improvement for the idiomatic item. This may indicate that, despite the students understanding of the rule for the idiomatic item, there will always be some mistakes, or it may indicate, as seen before, that the students were starting to lose interest in giving correct answers and were starting to let their choice of answers, again, depend more on chance. However, as mentioned before, due to the small sample size because of a large amount of students being excluded from the study for various reasons, this may well be the result of one or two students losing interest rather than a general tendency among all groups.

8 Conclusion

As mentioned above, the students did not acquire the passivization knowledge about idioms as they acquired the rules considering the allowing of idiomatic meaning assignment in anaphoric sentences. This is clearly visible in the results from the passivization exercise, in which only three children - of which one was even in the control group - chose not to passivize a non-passivizable idiomatic sentence.

The initial idea to compare the learning curve of the students considering the idiomatic item to the learning curve of the grammatical and lexical item could also not be executed successfully since the students only acquired significant knowledge of the idiomatic item which could thus not be compared to any other results. It is also unclear whether UG-driven or non-UG-driven acquisition occurred, since no continuous improvement occurred throughout the learning curve. This would disprove the hypothesis that idioms are learned through UG-driven acquisition since that would entail the students having about the same scores for all tests after the information had been processed correctly. However, it does also not support the gradual improvement hypothesis since that would require a constant improvement, which did not occur.

Overall, the learning curve results for the idiom do look most like a trial and error learning process, which does resemble gradual improvement more than UG-driven acquisition. This is however not clear-cut and should be studied further to be able to draw obvious conclusions.

Since the lesson plans for the three items were similar in structure and intensity, it is hard to find a reason for this development. However, an interesting theory arises when keeping in mind all participants were of roughly the same age. It is possible that different ages are the optimal starting ground for learning different aspects of languages. Thus, the age of 12.5 could then be viewed as a good age to start learning idioms, but not for learning grammar or lexemes. It is also uncertain whether the age of 12.5 is the ideal age for learning idioms. It does, however, display good results.

It would be interesting to continue this study while focusing on a different aspect: mainly to find out which ages are ideal for learning certain aspects of languages, such as the ones used here: grammar, lexicon, and idioms.

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Appendices

A list of appendices:

The pretest and post test1:

Test 1 for group A

Test 1 for group B

Test 1 for group C

Post tests 2 and 3:

Test 2 for group A

Test 2 for group B

Test 2 for group C

The lesson plans and sheets used:

Lesson plan and sheet for the grammatical item: that-trace effect

Lesson plan and sheet for the idiomatic items: kick the bucket and let the cat out of the bag

Lesson plan and sheet for the lexical item: curious

Test1a

Student number:

Date of birth:

jongen/meisje

Have you been taught English before this school year? Yes/no. If so, specify:

Do you speak more languages than Dutch and English? Yes/no. If so, specify:

Are these sentences correct? If not, choose from the phrases or words to the right to make the sentence grammatical. If the sentence is grammatically correct already, then choose the blank space. You can choose by marking the correct choice with an x. The chunks or words can only be added at the blank space in the sentence. Only add something when it's necessary! If you choose to add something when it's not necessary to make the sentence grammatical, your answer will be considered wrong.

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|-------------|--|
| The building ... collapsed belongs to my father. He won't be happy when he finds out. | who | his | that | |
| I have always been ... about languages. Now that I am in University, I can finally quench my thirst. | in love | twice | curious | |
| I was very sad when my grandmother suddenly ... the bucket. She had always been very nice to me. | kicked | hung | died | |
| Do you see that man over there? He looks quite ..., especially with those odd glasses. | curious | normal | yellow | |
| ... did you say saw Mary? - I'm not sure, but I think it was Jack. | that | who | when | |
| When I get old, I'd rather just ... than be old and miserable for a long time. | live | kick the bucket | be ill | |
| Who does she think ... saw her? She must have some idea. | he | that | Mary | |
| Even though he was very old already, everyone was surprised when uncle Tom kicked ... | life | the bucket | aunt Stella | |
| Jane is a very ... girl. She always wants to know everything. | happy | curious | strange | |

Now try passivizing the following sentences! (Only the ones you think are possible without changing the meaning.) Focus on the correct tense (grammar) and spelling! The form of the verb that can be used is in brackets behind the sentence. Write the answers at the other side of this paper.

- Mark saw Sarah at the gym last Friday. (was seen)
- My neighbor's cat kicked the bucket this morning. (was kicked)
- My niece eats a lot of fruit. (is eaten)
- I own a lot of high heels. (are owned)
- John drinks coca cola very often. (is drunk)
- Roxy is reading a book in her room. (is read)
- My neighbor let the cat out of the bag this morning. (was let)

Test1b

Student number:

Date of birth:

jongen/meisje

Have you been taught English before this school year? Yes/no. If so, specify:

Do you speak more languages than Dutch and English? Yes/no. If so, specify:

Are these sentences correct? If not, choose from the phrases or words to the right to make the sentence grammatical. If the sentence is grammatically correct already, then choose the blank space. You can choose by marking the correct choice with an x. The chunks or words can only be added at the blank space in the sentence. Only add something when it's necessary! If you choose to add something when it's not necessary to make the sentence grammatical, your answer will be considered wrong.

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------------|-------------|--|
| I couldn't live with myself anymore so I let the cat ... and told everyone what I had done. | walk | out of the bag | run free | |
| The building ... collapsed belongs to my father. He won't be happy when he finds out. | who | his | that | |
| I have always been ... about languages. Now that I am in University, I can finally quench my thirst. | in love | twice | curious | |
| Do you see that man over there? He looks quite ... , especially with those odd glasses. | curious | normal | yellow | |
| ... did you say saw Mary? - I'm not sure, but I think it was Jack. | that | who | when | |
| I asked him not to, but my friend Billie let ... out of the bag. He told my mother I had stolen my new skateboard. | the lie | the cat | shoplifting | |
| Who does she think ... saw her? She must have some idea. | he | that | Mary | |
| My niece had taken my friend's pen, but my friend didn't know and told she had lost it. I finally let ... out of the bag and told her what my friend had done. | nothing | everything | the cat | |
| Jane is a very ... girl. She always wants to know everything. | happy | curious | strange | |

Now try passivizing the following sentences! (Only the ones you think are possible without changing the meaning.) Focus on the correct tense (grammar) and spelling! The form of the verb that can be used is in brackets behind the sentence. Write the answers at the other side of this paper.

- Mark saw Sarah at the gym last Friday. (was seen)
- My neighbor's cat kicked the bucket this morning. (was kicked)
- My niece eats a lot of fruit. (is eaten)
- I own a lot of high heels. (are owned)
- John drinks coca cola very often. (is drunk)
- Roxy is reading a book in her room. (is read)
- My neighbor let the cat out of the bag this morning. (was let)

Test1c

Student number:

Date of birth:

jongen/meisje

Have you been taught English before this school year? Yes/no. If so, specify:

Do you speak more languages than Dutch and English? Yes/no. If so, specify:

Are these sentences correct? If not, choose from the phrases or words to the right to make the sentence grammatical. If the sentence is grammatically correct already, then choose the blank space. You can choose by marking the correct choice with an x. The chunks or words can only be added at the blank space in the sentence. Only add something when it's necessary! If you choose to add something when it's not necessary to make the sentence grammatical, your answer will be considered wrong.

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|--|
| I couldn't live with myself anymore so I let the cat ... and told everyone what I had done. | walk | out of the bag | run free | |
| The building ... collapsed belongs to my father. He won't be happy when he finds out. | who | his | that | |
| I have always been ... about languages. Now that I am in University, I can finally quench my thirst. | in love | twice | curious | |
| I was very sad when my grandmother suddenly ... the bucket. She had always been very nice to me. | kicked | hung | died | |
| Do you see that man over there? He looks quite ... , especially with those odd glasses. | curious | normal | yellow | |
| ... did you say saw Mary? - I'm not sure, but I think it was Jack. | that | who | when | |
| I asked him not to, but my friend Billie let ... out of the bag. He told my mother I had stolen my new skateboard. | the lie | the cat | shoplifting | |
| When I get old, I'd rather just ... than be old and miserable for a long time. | live | kick the bucket | be ill | |
| Who does she think ... saw her? She must have some idea. | he | that | Mary | |
| My niece had taken my friend's pen, but my friend didn't know and told she had lost it. I finally let ... out of the bag and told her what my friend had done. | nothing | everything | the cat | |
| Even though he was very old already, everyone was surprised when uncle Tom kicked ... | life | the bucket | aunt Stella | |
| Jane is a very ... girl. She always wants to know everything. | happy | curious | strange | |

Now try passivizing the following sentences! (Only the ones you think are possible without changing the meaning.) Focus on the correct tense (grammar) and spelling! The form of the verb that can be used is in brackets behind the sentence. Write the answers at the other side of this paper.

- Mark saw Sarah at the gym last Friday. (was seen)
- My neighbor's cat kicked the bucket this morning. (was kicked)
- My niece eats a lot of fruit. (is eaten)
- I own a lot of high heels. (are owned)
- John drinks coca cola very often. (is drunk)
- Roxy is reading a book in her room. (is read)
- My neighbor let the cat out of the bag this morning. (was let)

Test2a

Naam:

Geboortedatum:

jongen/meisje

Is Engels de eerste taal die je na je moedertaal hebt geleerd? Zo nee, welke dan?

De volgende zinnen zijn niet allemaal grammaticaal. Als ze dit niet zijn, kun je ze grammaticaal maken door een van de woorden of woordgroepen te kiezen die in de vakjes achter de zinnen staan. Als een zin al klopt, en je niets hoeft toe te voegen, kies je het lege vakje.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|--|
| Charlie has been asking me questions all morning. He wonders who I think ... saw him. | which | that | who | |
| My dog Fido was fourteen when he ... the bucket. I was very sad when he passed. | bit | kicked | drowned | |
| Have you seen yesterday's news? The item about sea cucumbers made me ... about them. | want | sad | curious | |
| I thought my grandparents would live forever. I was in shock when they kicked the ... | bucket | ceiling | grave | |
| Susanne knows someone saw her stealing from her mother. Who does she think ... saw her? | who | that | what | |
| Why is she reading that? I thought she didn't care about football. - You're wrong, she is very ... about it. | interested | curious | strange | |
| Who did you say ... John saw? I think it was the neighbor. | that | who | which | |
| Uncle Steve had not been ill for a long time before he died. You could say he ... | died slowly | loved life | kicked the bucket | |
| (In restaurant) I'd like to return this fish, please. It has a very ... color and I won't eat it. | sad | curious | regular | |

Maak de volgende zinnen passief en let goed op of ze dan nog wel hetzelfde betekenen. Let goed op de grammatica en de spelling! De werkwoordsvormen die je kunt gebruiken staan in haakjes achter de zinnen.

- a) I noticed Steve at school last week. (was noticed)
- b) Evelyn's grandpa kicked the bucket yesterday night. (was kicked)
- c) My little brother plays with toy cars a lot. (are played)
- d) My friend Sarah wears skirts very often. (are worn)
- e) Ralph eats ice cream. (is eaten)
- f) Lisa plays the piano every Thursday. (is played)
- g) Evelyn's grandpa let the cat out of the bag yesterday night. (was let)

Test2b

Naam:

Geboortedatum:

jongen/meisje

Is Engels de eerste taal die je na je moedertaal hebt geleerd? Zo nee, welke dan?

De volgende zinnen zijn niet allemaal grammaticaal. Als ze dit niet zijn, kun je ze grammaticaal maken door een van de woorden of woordgroepen te kiezen die in de vakjes achter de zinnen staan. Als een zin al klopt, en je niets hoeft toe te voegen, kies je het lege vakje.

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|--|
| Charlie has been asking me questions all morning. He wonders who I think ... saw him. | which | that | who | |
| Have you seen yesterday's news? The item about sea cucumbers made me ... about them. | want | sad | curious | |
| I didn't mean to, but when my mother pressured me I let the ... out of the bag. | cat | lie | secret | |
| Susanne knows someone saw her stealing from her mother. Who does she think ... saw her? | who | that | what | |
| Why is she reading that? I thought she didn't care about football. - You're wrong, she is very ... about it. | interested | curious | strange | |
| I wondered why I had not received my salary yet when my boss ... out of the bag. He told me and my coworkers there had been a terrible mix-up in administration. | let the cat | confessed | hopped | |
| Who did you say ... John saw? I think it was the neighbor. | that | who | which | |
| (In restaurant) I'd like to return this fish, please. It has a very ... color and I won't eat it. | sad | curious | regular | |
| Jonas didn't know how his mother found out he stole money from her purse. The truth is: I let ... | her know | the cat out of the bag | told on him | |

Maak de volgende zinnen passief en let goed op of ze dan nog wel hetzelfde betekenen. Let goed op de grammatica en de spelling! De werkwoordsvormen die je kunt gebruiken staan in haakjes achter de zinnen.

- I noticed Steve at school last week. (was noticed)
- Evelyn's grandpa kicked the bucket yesterday night. (was kicked)
- My little brother plays with toy cars a lot. (are played)
- My friend Sarah wears skirts very often. (are worn)
- Ralph eats ice cream. (is eaten)
- Lisa plays the piano every Thursday. (is played)
- Evelyn's grandpa let the cat out of the bag yesterday night. (was let)

Test2c

Naam:

Geboortedatum:

jongen/meisje

Is Engels de eerste taal die je na je moedertaal hebt geleerd? Zo nee, welke dan?

De volgende zinnen zijn niet allemaal grammaticaal. Als ze dit niet zijn, kun je ze grammaticaal maken door een van de woorden of woordgroepen te kiezen die in de vakjes achter de zinnen staan. Als een zin al klopt, en je niets hoeft toe te voegen, kies je het lege vakje.

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Charlie has been asking me questions all morning. He wonders who I think ... saw him. | which | that | who | |
| My dog Fido was fourteen when he ... the bucket. I was very sad when he passed. | bit | kicked | drowned | |
| Have you seen yesterday's news? The item about sea cucumbers made me ... about them. | want | sad | curious | |
| I thought my grandparents would live forever. I was in shock when they kicked the | bucket | ceiling | grave | |
| I didn't mean to, but when my mother pressured me I let the ... out of the bag. | cat | lie | secret | |
| Susanne knows someone saw her stealing from her mother. Who does she think ... saw her? | who | that | what | |
| Why is she reading that? I thought she didn't care about football. - You're wrong, she is very ... about it. | interested | curious | strange | |
| I wondered why I had not received my salary yet when my boss ... out of the bag. He told me and my coworkers there had been a terrible mix-up in administration. | let the cat | confessed | hopped | |
| Who did you say ... John saw? I think it was the neighbor. | that | who | which | |
| Uncle Steve had not been ill for a long time before he died. You could say he | died slowly | loved life | kicked the bucket | |
| (In restaurant) I'd like to return this fish, please. It has a very ... color and I won't eat it. | sad | curious | regular | |
| Jonas didn't know how his mother found out he stole money from her purse. The truth is: I let | her know | the cat out of the bag | told on him | |

Maak de volgende zinnen passief en let goed op of ze dan nog wel hetzelfde betekenen. Let goed op de grammatica en de spelling! De werkwoordsvormen die je kunt gebruiken staan in haakjes achter de zinnen.

- I noticed Steve at school last week. (was noticed)
- Evelyn's grandpa kicked the bucket yesterday night. (was kicked)
- My little brother plays with toy cars a lot. (are played)
- My friend Sarah wears skirts very often. (are worn)
- Ralph eats ice cream. (is eaten)
- Lisa plays the piano every Thursday. (is played)
- Evelyn's grandpa let the cat out of the bag yesterday night. (was let)

Grammar – that-trace effect:

1

- a) Who did you say John saw?
- b) Who did you say that John saw?

2

- a) Who does he say he talked to?
- b) Who does he say that he talked to?

3

- a) I wonder who he believes he saw.
- b) I wonder who he believes that he saw.

→ Overgeneralized rule: that is always optional.

4

- a) Who did you say saw John?
- b) * Who did you say that saw John?

5

- a) Who does he say talked to him?
- b) * Who does he say that talked to him?

→ Revised rule: that is optional, except when the 'who' at the start of the sentence is the subject.

6

- a) * The building collapsed belongs to Mary.
- b) The building that collapsed belongs to Mary.

→ Rule adjusted again: that is optional, except when the 'who' at the start of the sentence is the subject. When that refers to a non-personal (=relative) pronoun subject (so: not 'who'), it is required.

Grammar

1

- a) Who did you say John saw?
- b) Who did you say that John saw?

2

- a) Who does he say he talked to?
- b) Who does he say that he talked to?

3

- a) I wonder who he believes he saw.
- b) I wonder who he believes that he saw.

4

- a) Who did you say saw John?
- b) * Who did you say that saw John?

5

- a) Who does he say talked to him?
- b) * Who does he say that talked to him?

6

- a) * The building collapsed belongs to Mary.
- b) The building that collapsed belongs to Mary.

Idiom – kick the bucket & let the cat out of the bag:

Kick the bucket:

1

- a) We didn't expect him to die so soon, but my uncle Steve kicked the bucket last night.
- b) My grandma is preparing her will, in case she kicks the bucket.
- c) I wouldn't want to know when I will kick the bucket, even if I could.

→ Overgeneralized: means 'to die'. Different tense forms allowed.

2

- a) Whereas grandpa John died after being sick for a long time, my other grandpa, Martin, suddenly kicked the bucket.
- b) I wouldn't want to live with many medical conditions when I'm old; then I'd rather kick the bucket and have it over with.

→ Revised rule: means 'to die suddenly'.

3

- a) * My friend's cousin Ron kicked the bucket, and his aunt kicked it too.
- b) * At the same time my grandparents kicked the bucket, my husband's kicked it too.

→ Additional rule: loses its idiomatic meaning when in the above form.

Let the cat out of the bag:

1

- a) We didn't have a clue what was going on, until my brother let the cat out of the bag.
- b) My coworker Samantha finally let the cat out of the bag and told my boss she had seen someone stealing his files.
- c) I hope my friend will confess – if he doesn't, I will have to let the cat out of the bag and tell on him.

→ Overgeneralized: means 'to tell something'.

2

- a) I begged my niece not to tell my secret, but she let the cat out of the bag anyway.
- b) I thought I was doing something wrong with my new iPhone, but then the service employee let the cat out of the bag and told me it was broken.

→ Revised rule: means 'to expose a secret'.

3

- a) While my cousin let the cat out of the bag, I let it out too.
- b) Although my friend told me not to, I let the cat out of the bag. Later, my friend let it out too.

Additional rule: retains idiomatic meaning when in the above form.

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Lexicon – curious:

1

- a) I am very curious about astronomy. I'd like to know all about the stars.
- b) My nephew Jimmy is always asking me all sorts of things about me. He's very curious.
- c) I recently started reading about golf. A commercial I saw made me curious about it.

→ Overgeneralized rule: curious means having interest and nothing else.

2

- a) This fish has a very curious color. I don't think it's fresh and I'd rather eat something else.
- b) Look, there's a man standing outside your house. Does he visit often?
- That's my uncle and he never visits us. That's curious...

→ Revised rule: curious means having interest and can also mean 'odd' or 'strange'.

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