

PART A: 1. SUMMARY

Idiomatic expressions have been traditionally defined as phrases or strings of words whose figurative interpretation cannot be derived solely from the composition of the individual words of the phrase (Swinney & Cutler, 1979). Thus, for the idiom, *kick the bucket*, the verb *kick* and the noun *bucket* do not individually contribute to the intended meaning of the idiomatic expression. How do bilingual speakers comprehend idiomatic expressions? Is the literal interpretation of an idiom so highly automatized that, during comprehension, the literal interpretation (i.e., the action of physically kicking a bucket as a soccer ball) precedes the nonliteral or figurative interpretation (i.e., death)? Alternatively, are bilinguals more likely to trigger the nonliteral interpretation of the idiom directly? Although a significant number of studies have addressed linguistic aspects of idioms (e.g., acquisition, transfer, avoidance) in bilingualism and second language learning, little is known about idiom processing and on-line aspects of bilingual idiom comprehension (e.g., Cieřlicka, 2006; Matlock & Heredia, 2002). This lack of research into the bilingual on-line processing of idioms contrasts with the rich and extensive database of empirical and theoretical developments in the monolingual literature (see for example, Caillies & Butcher, 2007).