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Two of a kind

Idiomatic expressions by native speakers and second language learners

Everyday language abounds with words that frequently co-occur in more or less fixed combinations. Among these combinations are idiomatic expressions like *to kick the bucket* and *to spill the beans*. These phrases convey a figurative meaning that is often unrelated to the meaning of their component words. While native speakers are generally aware of the figurative meaning, even highly proficient second language (L2) learners experience difficulties in mastering L2 idioms.

At present, it is not clear how L2 learners deal with idiomatic expressions in their new language and how their performance and processing compare to that of native speakers. This thesis addresses these issues by investigating idiom knowledge, representation, learning and processing by L2 learners relative to native speakers.

This thesis shows that differences in idiom knowledge between native speakers and L2 learners can be ascribed to differences in experience with idioms, rather than to different underlying acquisition mechanisms. These differences can be overcome by providing focused training through a Computer Assisted Language Learning system in which L2 learners receive intensive practice and immediate corrective feedback. In terms of idiom processing, this thesis reveals differences between native speakers and L2 learners that could not be resolved by focused training, at least not with the amount of practice that was provided here. Providing L2 learners with even more training is expected to lead to more native-like idiom processing. These findings provide important theoretical insights into L1 and L2 idiom processing, as well as valuable information for teaching practice and future research.

ISBN 978-94-6093-336-3

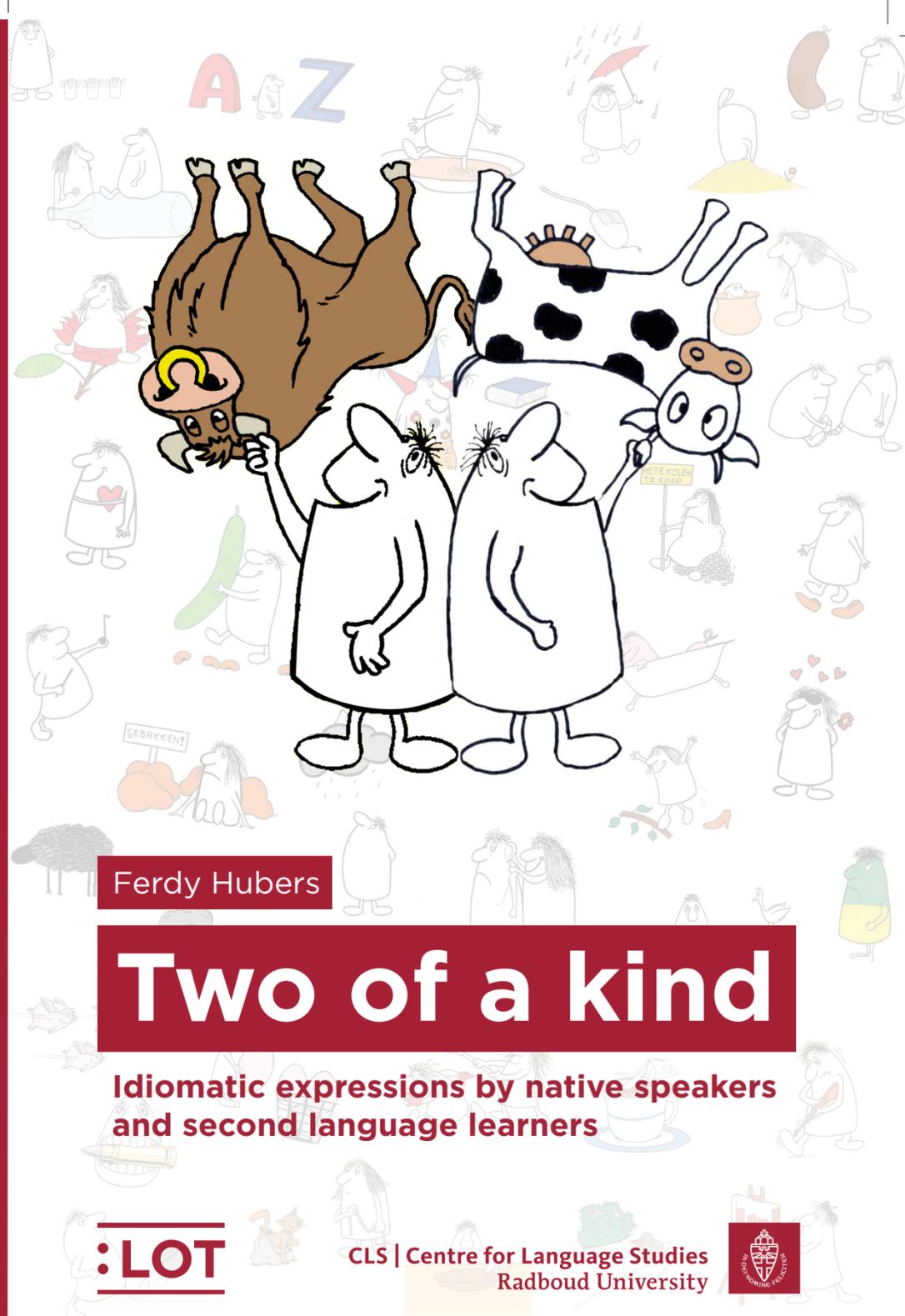
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