

To Analyze Idiom Used in Selected Song Lyrics of Birds of a Feather by Billie Eilish

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the idiomatic expressions found in the song lyrics of “Birds of a Feather” by Billie Eilish. Idioms are an essential part of figurative language that enriches the meaning of lyrics and contributes to the emotional and cultural depth of a song. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research identifies and classifies the idioms based on Makkai’s (1972) typology and interprets their contextual meanings through Leech’s (1981) theory of semantics. The analysis reveals various types of idioms, including phrasal verb idioms and tournure idioms, that reflect themes of emotional connection and loyalty. The findings demonstrate how idioms enhance lyrical expression and offer deeper insight into the artist’s intended message. This study contributes to the understanding of idiomatic usage in contemporary music and provides a linguistic perspective on lyrical interpretation.

Keywords: Billie Eilish, Figurative Language, Idiom, Semantics, Song Lyrics.

1. BACKGROUND

An idiom is a linguistic expression whose meaning cannot be interpreted literally from the individual words that compose it. In song lyrics, idioms play a crucial role in conveying emotions, personal experiences, and cultural messages implicitly. The use of idioms in lyrics adds depth to the meaning and enriches the artistic expression of the singer. (Ummah, 2019)

Previous studies have shown that idioms are often employed in song lyrics to express more profound meanings. For instance, an analysis of Katy Perry’s song lyrics revealed that idioms are used to articulate the artist’s emotions and personal experiences. Similarly, research on Taylor Swift’s lyrics demonstrated that idioms contribute significantly to conveying emotion and storytelling more effectively.

The song “Birds of a Feather” by Billie Eilish, released in 2024, serves as a compelling contemporary example for such analysis due to its potentially rich and complex use of idiomatic language. Examining the idioms in this song can offer insight into how figurative language is utilized in modern pop music to communicate emotion and message to listeners.

This study aims to examine the use of idiomatic expressions in the lyrics of the song “Birds of a Feather” by Billie Eilish using a qualitative linguistic approach. The primary goal is to identify the idioms embedded in the lyrics, classify them according to

linguistic categories based on the idiom typology proposed by Makkai (1972) and McCarthy and O'Dell (2010), and interpret their contextual meanings using Leech's (1981) semantic framework. Through this research, the study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of how idioms function to enrich meaning and convey emotional nuance in song lyrics, while also highlighting their role in expressing the artist's intended message to the audience..

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, idioms are understood as fixed, non-literal expressions whose overall meanings cannot be deduced from their individual words. This aligns with Makkai's (1972) typology, which distinguishes among phrasal verb idioms (e.g., "break down"), tournure idioms where figurative meaning emerges from a conventional phrase (e.g., "kick the bucket"), and irreversible binomials—fixed word pairs such as "bread and butter". These classifications remain foundational in linguistic inquiry

Gunawan & Eripuddin (2019) conducted a qualitative analysis of Adele's songs and identified 56 idiomatic expressions, categorized into phrasal verb, tournure, and irreversible binomial idioms. They found phrasal verb idioms were especially prevalent, followed by tournure types, with contextual meanings reflecting personal experience and emotional states.

Sari, Aderlaepe & Sapan (2023) similarly examined Adele's 25 album, finding 29 idioms in six songs. Again, phrasal verb idioms and tournure idioms dominated, aligning with Makkai's typology, and their context-related meanings were tied to themes of nostalgia, regret, and maturity.

Nguyen & Herman (2021) analyzed idiomatic expressions in Ed Sheeran's Divine project. They identified a total of 10 idioms—six phrasal verb idioms (60%) and four tournure idioms (40%)—highlighting the dominance of phrasal verbs and demonstrating how idioms contribute to the expressive quality of modern pop lyrics.

Using McCarthy & O'Dell (2010) and Leech's semantic theory (1981), she classified six idiom types—similes, binomials, clichés, fixed statements, and non-English idioms—and analyzed their connotative and reflected meanings. Her findings show how idioms serve to convey personal meaning and artistic voice. Moreover, studies on Teenage Dream identified numerous phrasal verb, prepositional verb, and partial idioms, underscoring the variety and frequency of idiomatic forms in her songs. (Sanad, 2017)

3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach. The choice of this method is based on the intention to describe and examine the idiomatic meaning and context contained in the lyrics of the song "Birds of a Feather" by Billie Eilish in depth and interpretatively. The qualitative descriptive approach gives the researcher the opportunity to investigate the implied meaning and use of idioms that cannot always be measured quantitatively, so it is suitable for the analysis of literary texts and song lyrics. The method has been widely applied in the study of song lyrics, for example in a study conducted by Ramadhan & Dewi (2022) who examined the meaning of idioms in Ed Sheeran's song, as well as in a study by Situmorang (2023) who discussed the figurative meaning in Keenan Te's song lyrics. (Adama et al., n.d.)

The sources of information in this research are divided into two categories, namely:

- a. The main source of information is the lyrics of the song "Birds of a Feather" sung by Billie Eilish. The lyrics are obtained from official sources such as the artist's official website or platforms that provide trusted lyrics.
- b. Additional sources of information in the form of supporting references such as books on linguistics, journal articles, and previous research related to the topics of idioms, semantic meanings, and metaphors in song lyrics. Some of the journals referenced include Litera Journal (Undhira Bali), ELL Journal (Universitas Negeri Padang), ICoAC Journal (ISBI Aceh), and Teaching English Journal (UHO).

The techniques applied to collect data were through documentation and literature research. Data were obtained through the following steps:

- a) The lyrics of the song "Birds of a Feather" were documented and their authenticity was verified with official sources.
- b) Idioms in the lyrics were recognized and recorded.
- c) Supporting literature was collected and analyzed to obtain appropriate theories and approaches in analyzing the data.
- d) Literature research was conducted to strengthen the theoretical basis and as a comparison to the results of the analysis.

This approach is in line with research by Putri & Ardi (2021) which emphasizes the importance of documentation and literature studies in qualitative analysis of song texts.

The data analysis technique in this study was carried out through the following steps:

1) Identification:

Researchers tracked all types of idioms, metaphors, and semantic expressions contained in the song lyrics. Idioms that were successfully found were then marked for the next classification process. This method refers to the approach applied by Situmorang (2023) in idiomatic studies on song lyrics.

2) Classification:

The idioms were categorized according to the theory proposed by Makkai (1972), which divides idioms into various types, such as work phrase idioms, tournure idioms, and invertible binomial idioms. This theory is relevant for detecting complex idiomatic structures in contemporary song lyrics.

3) Meaning Analysis:

In analyzing the meaning of idioms and semantic expressions, Leech's (1981) theory of meaning is applied, which distinguishes meaning into conceptual meaning (denotative) and associative meaning (connotative, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic). This approach allows an in-depth understanding of the function and role of idioms in conveying the emotional and artistic message of a song. (Julianto et al., 2023)

4) Contextual Interpretation:

The meaning of idioms and metaphors is studied in the thematic context of the song. Each idiomatic expression is interpreted based on the emotional feel of the song as well as the message the singer is trying to convey. This is important to see how idioms function not only as language tools, but also as a means of conveying aesthetic and emotional value.

5) Inference:

Based on the results of the analysis, the researcher draws conclusions about the types of idioms that appear most frequently, the contextual meaning of these idioms, and their contribution to the overall meaning of the song.

Studies with a similar approach can be found in Ramadhan & Dewi (2022), who highlighted the importance of context in analyzing idioms, and Situmorang (2023), who investigated the use of figurative language in popular songs in Indonesia.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identifying Idioms and Figurative Language

This research identifies several idioms and figurative expressions in the lyrics of the song "Birds of a Feather" by Billie Eilish. These expressions include:

- a. "Birds of a feather" is an idiom that means people with similar personalities or values are likely to be attracted to each other or stay together.
- b. "Stick together" is a phrasal verb idiom, which means being loyal and committed in a relationship.
- c. "Can't change the weather" is an idiom that uses a metaphor to describe situations or realities that people cannot control.
- d. Hyperbole is used in lyrics such as "Til I'm in the grave", "Til I rot away", and "'Til I'm in the casket you carry". These phrases show very strong emotions and extreme dedication in a romantic relationship.
- e. Some metaphors and symbols, such as "I want you to see / how you look to me" and "I don't know what I'm crying for," show the deep psychological and emotional aspects of the lyrics.

Classifying Idioms

Based on Makkai's (1972) classification of idioms, the idioms in this song can be categorized as follows:

Table 1. Types of Idioms in the Song "Birds of a Feather"

Idioms / Expressions	Idioms Classification	Contextual Function
"Birds of a feather"	Tornure Idiom	Symbolizes commonality and emotional attachment
"Stick together"	Phrasal Verb Idiom	Demonstrates commitment and loyalty
"Can't change the weather"	Tornure Idiom / Methaphor	Implies acceptance of uncertainty
"Til I'm in the grave"	Hyperbole	Express extreme and enduring love

Analysis of Contextual Meaning

The contextual meaning of the idioms used in this song is very important in creating a deep emotional atmosphere. The idiom "birds of a feather" is not only repeated in the music, but also emphasizes that the two people in the song have an emotional unity. In this

case, the idiom gives the impression that the main characters feel they are destined to be together because they share the same values or feelings.

Meanwhile, the phrase “stick together” shows how the characters in the lyrics are eager to maintain their relationship, despite the problems. This idiom reinforces the theme of strong and long-lasting love.

Expressions like “can't change the weather” give a deep figurative meaning. It signifies that they accept the fact that relationships are not always perfect, and there are things that cannot be changed, but love remains. This shows that the song is not only about romantic love, but also about weakness and acceptance.

The hyperbolic expressions in the section “Til I'm in the grave” onwards describe a very strong, almost obsessive emotional connection. This supports Billie Eilish's statement in a promotional interview that this song is a form of intense “love bomb”, full of promise and devotion that feels sweet but can also be overwhelming (Ningrat & Kamalia, 2024).

Comparison to Previous Research

The results of this study are similar to what other studies have found about how idioms are used in popular song lyrics. In the MAHADAYA journal, Kamalia and Juanda (2024) wrote that the song “Birds of a Feather” has six hyperbole expressions. These expressions highlight the strong affection and commitment in emotional relationships. They observed that Billie Eilish's lyrics mainly use metaphors and similes to show her unique artistic identity and emotional style. (Evantri Ngailo et al., 2022)

Additionally, research by Devianti (2022) and Angraini (2020) on Ed Sheeran and Adele's song lyrics showed that tournaure and phrasal verb idioms are common, which is also the case in this song. A study by Putra and Wulandari (2023) on Katy Perry's song lyrics found partial idioms and idioms with connotative meanings. These were used to express personal emotions and social messages. Therefore, it can be concluded that Billie Eilish's use of idioms is not only in line with current pop music trends but also demonstrates the narrative and emotional power of figurative language.

Implications of Findings

These findings suggest that idioms are important in shaping how listeners understand and experience a song. The use of idioms with strong emotional and connotative value makes song lyrics more than just entertainment. They also serve as a

way to reflect on emotions and culture. For teaching English, these findings offer practical ways to use song lyrics as real and communicative teaching materials for learning idioms.

5. CONCLUSION

This research studies how idioms are used in the lyrics of Billie Eilish's song "Birds of a Feather," focusing on the types of idioms and their meanings in the song. The study found that idioms are key to creating deeper meaning, emotional tones, and artistic expression in the song.

The study shows that the most common types of idioms in "Birds of a Feather" are *turnure* idioms and phrasal verb idioms, as defined by Makkai's theory (1972). Expressions like "birds of a feather," "stick together," and "can't change the weather" are idioms that can't be understood literally. Instead, you need to understand their idiomatic meaning and how they are used in context.

Also, there are other figurative language devices like metaphors and hyperboles that strengthen the idiomatic meaning. Phrases such as "'Til I'm in the grave" and "'Til I rot away" use hyperbole to show limitless loyalty, extreme dedication, and strong emotions typical of the romantic relationship in the song. These expressions do more than just function linguistically; they also help convey the song's emotional and aesthetic message.

The results of this research are very important for language studies, especially in the fields of semantics and pragmatics. This research shows that idioms in song lyrics are not just language sweeteners. They also play an important role in conveying feelings, personal experiences and cultural values. Thus, idioms are effective tools for artistic communication in popular music.

In terms of teaching, this research also helps in teaching English as a foreign language. Song lyrics that have idioms can be used as original learning materials. This helps students understand how idioms are used and improves their ability to understand meaning and interpret texts. Using songs in learning can make students more enthusiastic and feel closer to the material being taught.

This research only looked at one Billie Eilish song, so there are still many that have not been studied. Future researchers should examine more songs from the same singer or other singers with different types of music. Examining entire albums or comparing songs from different cultures can provide a new understanding of the use of idioms in music around the world.

In addition, other researchers can use various sciences, such as combining language with literature, music psychology, or cultural sociology. This is done to better understand the meaning and use of idioms in social and emotional life. Research that compares cultures can also show how idioms are used to reflect regional values or common values in popular music.

In summary, this study of idioms in song lyrics shows that language in music illustrates how complex humans are. Words not only have actual meanings, but also become powerful ways to convey feelings, affection and cultural meanings.

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