



Idiomatic Expressions Found in Taylor Swift's Song "Shake It Off" Lyrics

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Abstract. *The present study aims to identify and analyse idiomatic expressions in the lyrics of "Shake It Off" by Taylor Swift. Idioms are a form of non literal expression which often pose a challenge for English language learners, due to the fact that their literal meanings are not easily discernible. Utilising a descriptive qualitative approach, this research analyses idioms based on Makkai's (1972) classification, which includes six types: phrasal verb idioms, tournure idioms, irreversible binomial idioms, phrasal compound idioms, incorporating verb idioms, and pseudo idioms. The findings indicate that the composition is replete with idiomatic usage, reflecting emotional meanings and social messages implicitly. A total of fourteen idioms were identified, which serve to reinforce Taylor Swift's stylistic language and make the song an effective and contextual medium for the purposes of English language learning. It is anticipated that these findings will contribute to the development of language teaching, particularly with regard to the comprehension of idiomatic meaning within the context of popular culture.*

Keyword : Idiomatic Expression, Lyrics, Song, Taylor Swift

1. INTRODUCTION

English as a global language is undergoing rapid development, particularly through popular media such as music. A notable facet of acquiring proficiency in English pertains to the utilisation of idiomatic expressions, which frequently manifest within the lyrics of popular music. Idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be translated literally, which makes their understanding a particular challenge for foreign language learners.(Rohmah, 2005)

Idioms, also known as idiomatic expressions, are informal language forms whose meanings differ from the literal meanings of the individual words. According to Halliday (M.A.K. Halliday, 2007), idioms are unique to each language and cannot be directly translated into another. (sinaga, herman, hutahean, 2020),(Biber, et al 2006) also note that idioms express meanings that are distinct from the literal definitions of the words they contain.

It is evident that Taylor Swift, a prominent figure in the realm of music as a singer and songwriter, has garnered acclaim for her adept utilisation of idioms within her lyrical compositions. This skillful approach serves to fortify the message and emotional resonance of her musical works, thereby enhancing their impact on listeners. The song "Shake It Off" is one of Taylor Swift's works that is not only popular on a global scale but also rich in idiomatic expressions, such as the phrase "shake it off", which means to forget or ignore negative things. This phenomenon underscores the significance of examining idioms in song lyrics as a valuable source for learning and vocabulary enrichment.

Research on idiomatic expressions in song lyrics has been extensively conducted; however, the majority of studies continue to focus on the analysis of idioms in songs in general or in the works of other musicians. To date, the number of studies which have examined the use of idioms in the oeuvre of Taylor Swift is still very limited. Indeed, a comprehensive understanding of the idioms employed in this song has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field of English language teaching, particularly with regard to enhancing learners' ability to communicate naturally and comprehend the cultural context of native speakers. This discrepancy underscores the necessity for further research in this area.

This study sets out with the objective of identifying the types of idiomatic expressions found in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's song "Shake It Off". The objective of this research is to provide an answer to the following question: The following investigation will explore the presence of idiomatic expressions in the lyrics of the song entitled 'Shake It Off', and the interpretation of these expressions in the context of their usage.

The findings of this study are anticipated to make a significant contribution to the advancement of linguistic scholarship, with a particular emphasis on the domain of idioms and their utilisation in the context of English language acquisition. Moreover, the findings of this study can be employed by English teachers as contextual teaching material, by content creators to enhance educational content, and by marketers or other professionals who aspire to comprehend the utilisation of English in a more natural and effective manner within the context of popular culture.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Idioms are a significant aspect of language studies due to their meanings, which cannot be interpreted literally. Larson (1998) defines idioms as units of meaning whose interpretations go beyond the literal meanings of the individual words and must be understood as a whole. In English, idiomatic expressions refer to culturally conventional phrases used by native speakers, often carrying figurative meanings. According to Palmer (1981), idioms are unique expressions whose meanings are neither logically derived from grammar nor vocabulary, making them challenging for foreign language learners to grasp.

Idioms serve diverse functions in language, particularly in enriching expression and softening meaning. In literary texts, idioms are often used to create stylistic effects, convey emotions implicitly, and strengthen characterization. Carter and McCarthy (2006) note that idioms play a key role in reflecting cultural values and identity, while also signaling familiarity and closeness in everyday communication.

Songs, as a form of authentic text, are also rich sources of idiomatic expressions. In language learning, popular songs such as those by Taylor Swift can be utilized to introduce idioms within real-life contexts, helping learners to understand and use them more naturally.

Previous studies have also explored idioms in song lyrics. For instance, (Agung & Bora, 2023) analyzed idiomatic expressions in Ed Sheeran's songs and found that idioms were used not just for stylistic purposes, but also to convey deep emotional meaning. Another study by (Prayoga, 2020) on Adele's songs concluded that idioms contribute to the rhetorical strength and aesthetic appeal of the lyrics. These findings highlight the important role idioms play in song lyrics as a modern form of literary expression.

3. RESEARCH METODE

The present study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with its primary focus being the analysis of words, phrases and sentences rather than numbers. As articulated by (Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Sorensen, 2010) the objective of qualitative research is to furnish an exhaustive verbal portrayal, thereby facilitating a more profound comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation. The data for this study is drawn from the official music video of Taylor Swift's song "Shake It Off" (Taylor's Version), which was uploaded to her YouTube channel on 18 August 2014. The data collection techniques employed in this study encompass the following: firstly, an auditory analysis of the song, secondly, the transcription of the lyrics, and thirdly, the identification of idiomatic expressions. The subsequent data analysis process follows the steps outlined by Sinaga, Herman, and Marpaung (2020), which involve a meticulous reading process, followed by the identification, classification, and analysis of idioms based on Makkai's (1972) theory of lexical idioms. In the final stage of the research process, the researcher will draw conclusions about the types and functions of idioms found in the lyrics of "Shake It Off." This methodological approach enables the researcher to explore the expressions in the song in depth and to understand the role of idioms in conveying the overall meaning and emotional effect of the song.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A close analysis of the lyrics to the song "Shake It Off" by Taylor Swift reveals the use of a number of idiomatic expressions. These expressions are employed to express a variety of emotions, attitudes, and the primary message of the song. As posited by Makkai (1972), the following six categories have been proposed for the classification of idioms: The following idioms are to be considered: phrasal verb idioms, tournure phrase idioms, irreversible binomial idioms, phrasal compound idioms, incorporating verb idioms, and pseudo-idioms. The

researcher successfully identified fourteen idioms that fall into the categories classified by Makkai (A.Makkai, 1972). The detailed findings and discussion are presented below.

Table 1. Idiom Expression Found in Taylor Swift's Songs ' shake it off '

Phrasal verb idioms

Idioms	Idiomatic Meanings
Shake it off	To let go of negativity or criticism
Keep cruisin'	To keep going with life despite problems
Gettin' down and out	To feel very low or depressed

Tournure Idioms

Idioms	Idiomatic Meanings
Can't stop, won't stop	Strong determination to keep going
I make the moves up as I go	To do things spontaneously or without planning

Irreversible Binomial Idioms

Idioms	Idiomatic Meanings
The haters gonna hate	Haters will always continue to hate
The players gonna play	Those who play with others' feelings will keep doing so
The fakers gonna fake	Pretenders will always pretend
The heartbreakers gonna break	Heartbreakers will keep breaking hearts

Phrasal Compound Idioms

Idioms	Idiomatic Meanings
Sick beat	A very cool or impressive musical rhythm
Dirty, dirty cheats	People who cheat in a dishonest and disgraceful way

Incorporating Verb Idioms

Idioms	Idiomatic Meanings
Never miss a beat	To stay sharp, focused, and on rhythm

Pseudo Idioms

Idioms	Idiomatic Meanings
Dancin' on my own	Enjoying life independently; emotional self-reliance
You could've been gettin' down to this sick beat	You should've been having fun instead of being upset

The following discussion will present the findings of research conducted on the frequency of idiomatic expressions in Taylor Swift's song "Shake It Off". The idioms are categorised into six types: The following idiomatic expressions are included: Phrasal verb idioms (three idioms), Turned idioms (two idioms), Irreversible binomial idioms (four idioms), Phrasal compound idioms (two idioms), Incorporating verb idioms (one idiom), Pseudo idioms (two idioms) The most prevalent category of idioms is that of irreversible binomial idioms, followed by phrasal verb idioms, phrasal compound idioms, and so forth. This suggests that the song employs a range of idioms to enrich its lyrical content. The following points provide further details from Table 1.

- **Phrasal Verb Idioms**

“Shake it off”

The idiomatic expression "shake it off" is employed in the song's title itself. The phrase "shake it off" is regarded as a phrasal verb idiom, a term defined as consisting of a verb (shake) followed by a pronoun (it) and a particle (off). This combination produces the idiomatic meaning "to let go of or free oneself from stress," which cannot be understood from the literal meanings of "shake" or "off" alone.

“Keep cruising”

This idiomatic expression appears in the lyrics:

“But I keep cruisin' / Can't stop, won't stop movin”

The term is classified as a phrasal verb, defined as a combination of a verb and a present participle. In this case, the verb is "keep" and the present participle is "cruisin'". Despite its deviation from the conventional phrasal verb structure (due to the absence of a preposition), this phrase constitutes an idiomatic expression signifying "to persist in one's forward progress in life." The term is not, idiomatically speaking, used to denote the literal act of driving or cruising; rather, it serves as a metaphor for life's journey.

- **Tournure Idioms**

“Can’t stop, won’t stop”

This idiomatic expression appears in the lyric:

“But I keep cruisin', can't stop, won't stop movin'”

Structurally, this phrase is classified as a turn-of-phrase idiom, as it comprises two short clauses connected by a comma. This phenomenon is regarded as a tournure due to its complete sentence-like form and idiomatic function in expressing strong determination. It is noteworthy that the full meaning of the phrase cannot be comprehended solely from its grammatical structure.

“I make the moves up as I go”

This idiomatic expression is found in the lyric:

“I make the moves up as I go (moves up as I go) / And that's what they don't know”

The phrase "I make the moves up as I go" is regarded as a tournure due to its possession of a full sentence structure, incorporating an adverbial clause (as I go), and its resemblance to a declarative sentence. Nevertheless, its idiomatic meaning – "to improvise without a fixed plan" is far removed from the literal interpretation of make the moves up. This idiom is indicative of a free-spirited and creative character. It is evident that Taylor's position is one of autonomy, marked by her assertion that she does not feel compelled to adhere to the standards or constraints imposed by others. She demonstrates a clear inclination towards self-direction and the establishment of her own trajectory in a manner that is distinct from and independent of external influences.

- **Irreversible binomial idioms**

“The haters gonna hate”, “The players gonna play “

“The fakers gonna fake”, “The heartbreakers gonna break”

The lyric under scrutiny features an idiomatic expression that adheres to a consistent structural paradigm, comprising a plural noun, an auxiliary (gonna) and a verb. This is a contemporary manifestation of irreversible binomials, whereby the sequence of words is immutable (the phrase "hate gonna haters" is devoid of meaning). The term is employed idiomatically to describe a persistent social behaviour, for example by way of the following statement: "haters are always going to hate." The reiteration of this form serves to emphasise its idiomatic nature.

- **Phrasal Compound Idioms**

“Sick beat”

This idiomatic expression appears in the lyric:

“You could've been gettin' down to this sick beat”

The term under discussion is classified as a phrasal compound idiom, insofar as it consists of two or more words that form a single idiomatic unit. The phrase is composed of an adjective (sick) followed by a noun (beat). The term 'sick' can be defined as 'ill' in the conventional sense, yet in contemporary slang, it is employed to convey a sense of 'cool' or 'awesome'. When combined with beat, it forms a compound idiom that does not carry a literal meaning, thus qualifying it for inclusion in this category.

“Dirty, dirty cheats”

This idiomatic expression is found in the lyric:

“And the dirty, dirty cheats of the world”

This phrase constitutes a compound idiom, as it does not merely describe cheating behaviour in a literal sense; rather, it creates an expression with strong emotional and idiomatic force, thereby intensifying its negative connotation. The term is employed to denote individuals who exhibit a flagrant disregard for honesty and integrity, frequently resorting to deceitful practices. The repeated use of the word "dirty" serves to reinforce the negative connotations associated with the concept. The phrase under scrutiny here highlights individuals who betray or morally harm others.

- **Incorporating Verb Idioms**

“Never miss a beat”

This idiomatic expression is found in the lyric:

“I never miss a beat, I'm lightnin' on my feet”

This idiom does not literally mean “not skipping a beat,” but rather conveys the meaning “to stay in rhythm or remain focused in what one is doing.” Since the idiomatic object *a beat* cannot be understood literally in this context, it is classified as an incorporating verb idiom.

- **Pseudo Idioms**

“Dancin’ on my own”

This idiomatic expression is found in the lyric:

“I'm dancin' on my own (dancin' on my own)”

This phrase is regarded as a pseudo-idiom due to its composition of a verb phrase (dancing) followed by a prepositional phrase (on my own). The term can be translated literally as 'dancing

alone', yet within the context of the song, it is indicative of emotional independence and freedom. The phrase under consideration is a pseudo-idiom, as its meaning derives from cultural and emotional usage.

"You could've been gettin' down to this sick beat"

Although this phrase has a regular grammatical structure, its idiomatic meaning is "enjoying the music and having fun," not merely the physical act of getting down. The blend of cultural context (pop music) and connotative meaning makes it a pseudo idiom.

5. CONCLUSION

The lyrical analysis of "Shake It Off" by Taylor Swift indicates the utilisation of various idiomatic expressions, which function to convey a range of emotions, characteristics, and social messages within the composition. These idioms encompass six types, classified by Makkai (1972), with irreversible binomial idioms being the most dominant. The findings confirm that idioms in song lyrics serve multiple linguistic and cultural functions. From a linguistic perspective, idiomatic expressions enrich the song's narrative by allowing the songwriter to convey complex meanings, emotions, and attitudes in a compact and stylistically appealing way. For instance, phrases like "shake it off" and "can't stop, won't stop" encapsulate themes of resilience, self-confidence, and emotional release in a manner that literal language may not fully capture. These idioms also enhance the song's rhetorical impact, giving it a strong voice and relatable tone. This finding suggests that idioms in the song function not only as decorative language elements but also as potent rhetorical devices for conveying connotative and cultural meanings. This study corroborates the notion that popular songs such as "Shake It Off" can serve as valuable resources in the context of English language learning, particularly with regard to enhancing the ability to comprehend idioms in a natural and contextual manner. Consequently, it is recommended that teachers, learners and language practitioners consider the use of music media as an engaging and relevant approach to teaching idioms.

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