



Idiomatic Expressions Found in Arctic Monkeys' Song "Do I Wanna Know?"

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Abstract. *The present study aims to identify and analyze idiomatic expressions in the lyrics of "Do I Wanna Know?" by Arctic Monkeys. Idioms are non-literal expressions that often cause difficulty for English learners due to their figurative nature. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a focus on semantic and contextual analysis based on the theories of Palmer (2007), Larson (2010), and Halliday (2014). The results indicate that the song contains several idiomatic expressions that reflect emotional states such as longing, regret, and insecurity. These findings suggest that song lyrics can serve as effective, authentic, and engaging media for learning idioms in EFL contexts. The study also highlights the pedagogical and cultural implications of using popular songs as teaching materials.*

Keywords: *Idiomatic Expression, Song Lyrics, Arctic Monkeys, Semantics, EFL*

1. INTRODUCTION

English learners often struggle with idiomatic expressions because these phrases have meanings that differ from the literal definition of their parts. Idioms are culturally embedded and context-sensitive, making them difficult to understand without a deep understanding of their usage. However, idioms are often used in everyday conversation, literature, and especially music.

The use of songs in language education has become more popular in recent years. Songs can be a powerful tool in the classroom because they combine rhythm, emotion, and real-life expressions. Learners tend to remember language from songs more easily because it is presented in a natural and enjoyable context. Teng (2018) notes that songs help retain new vocabulary, especially figurative language.

This study focuses on Arctic Monkeys' song "Do I Wanna Know?", which contains emotionally rich lyrics filled with idiomatic expressions. The song is popular among young listeners and provides authentic material for exploring language use beyond textbooks. This paper aims to identify idiomatic expressions in the song and explain their semantic meaning and contextual relevance.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge linguistic theory with practical language teaching. While semantic analysis is often confined to academic discourse, this paper offers a pedagogical perspective by showing how idiomatic expressions from authentic texts—

specifically songs—can be used to enhance students' vocabulary development and figurative comprehension in real-world settings.

However, previous studies have not specifically examined idioms in Arctic Monkeys' lyrics from a semantic and pedagogical perspective. Therefore, this study aims to identify idiomatic expressions and explore their meanings within the context of the song "Do I Wanna Know?" as a contribution to English language learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Idiomatic Expressions

According to Makkai (2010), idioms are fixed expressions whose meaning cannot be determined from their individual components. They are understood through usage and convention. For example, "spill the beans" means to reveal a secret, not literally to drop legumes.

Palmer (2007) explains that idioms serve expressive and stylistic functions in language. They condense meaning and allow speakers to communicate complex emotions in a few words. Idioms are not just decoration; they are key to fluency and natural communication.

Semantics and Context

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. Larson (2010) argues that meaning is shaped by context. The same word or phrase can mean different things depending on who says it, when, where, and to whom. That is especially true for idioms.

Halliday (2014) introduces three metafunctions of language: ideational (content), interpersonal (social interaction), and textual (organization). Idioms often reflect all three. In songs, idioms help build character voice and emotional narrative.

Teaching Idioms through Songs

Many studies highlight the benefits of using music to teach idioms. Amelia (2021) found that students learned idioms more effectively through lyrics than definitions. Songs create a context where idioms feel real, not abstract. Yuliana and Handayani (2020) also note that songs are accessible and low-cost, which makes them perfect for classroom use. When learners connect emotion to an idiom, they remember it better and use it more accurately.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which is appropriate for analyzing linguistic phenomena such as idiomatic expressions in authentic texts. The purpose of this approach is to understand and interpret meaning without manipulating variables, allowing for a naturalistic and detailed exploration of the data.

Data Source

The primary data source in this research is the official lyrics of the song “Do I Wanna Know?” by Arctic Monkeys. This song was chosen due to its rich use of figurative and idiomatic language that reflects emotional and psychological themes relevant to EFL learners. The data were obtained from the official lyrics of the song as published by the band on digital platforms. The song was chosen based on its popularity and high frequency of idiomatic and metaphorical expressions.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected through a close reading and documentation technique. The lyrics were examined line by line to identify expressions that meet the criteria of idioms, such as: Meaning that is not compositional (cannot be understood from literal words), Figurative or metaphorical significance, Dependence on context for proper interpretation. Idioms were selected based on consensus from semantic theory and their appearance in informal English usage.

Data Analysis Technique

The analysis process follows a content analysis model. Each identified idiomatic expression was analyzed from two perspectives:

- Semantic analysis, based on the theoretical framework of Palmer (2007) and Larson (2010), to determine the meaning embedded within the idiom.
- Contextual analysis, based on Halliday’s (2014) functional grammar approach, to examine how each idiom functions in relation to the speaker’s intent, tone, and overall message of the song.

This method allows for a nuanced interpretation of how language functions in authentic artistic expression and supports language learners’ comprehension of idiomatic meaning in real contexts. The analysis was conducted using a content analysis technique by classifying each idiom based on its meaning and contextual function. The idioms were then interpreted based

on semantic theory and cultural relevance.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Idiomatic Expressions Found in the Song

The analysis of "Do I Wanna Know?" reveals several idiomatic expressions that are deeply embedded in emotional meaning. These idioms express longing, regret, emotional attachment, and insecurity. The following expressions were identified as idiomatic due to their non-literal nature and reliance on context for interpretation.

Table 1. Idiomatic Expressions Found in the Lyrics of "Do I Wanna Know?" by Arctic Monkeys.

Idiom	Literal Meaning	Figurative Meaning	Contextual Function
Crawling back to you	Moving on hands and knees	Returning emotionally weakened	Regret, submission
Your heart's still open	Hearts not closed	Being emotionally available	Hope for reconciliation
Had a few	A few drinks	Slightly drunk, emotionally vulnerable	Confession of weakness
Too busy being yours	Emotionally occupied	Being obsessed with someone	Obsession, fixation
Been wondering	Ongoing thinking	Repeated mental reflection	Obsession, confusion
Ever thought of calling	Considered phone call	Desire to reconnect	Longing, emotional distance
Fall for somebody new	Trip and fall	Fall in love with someone else	Jealousy, fear of abandonment

In-Depth Semantic and Contextual Analysis

"Crawling back to you"

This phrase metaphorically depicts a situation where someone returns to another person not with strength, but in a position of emotional submission. "Crawling" implies humiliation, regret, or surrender. In this song, it reflects the persona's vulnerability and willingness to let go of pride. From a semantic viewpoint, this idiom compresses the complex feeling of guilt and emotional dependence into one visual expression. Contextually, it shows the reversal of power: the speaker has emotionally lost control. In an EFL setting, learners often misinterpret such idioms unless guided through emotional and situational cues.

“Your heart’s still open”

Literally referencing a physical state, this idiom implies that the person is emotionally available or still willing to reconcile. The heart is a common metaphor for emotion in English and many other languages. Here, “still open” suggests the possibility of forgiveness or reconnection. Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction is evident, as the phrase builds emotional interaction between speaker and listener. This idiom can also spark a teaching moment about cultural metaphors and emotional symbolism across languages.

“Had a few”

This phrase is colloquial for drinking alcohol, especially in moderate quantity, and is often used to signal that someone is more likely to act emotionally or impulsively. In the song, it implies that the speaker is thinking about calling the other person under the influence of emotion and alcohol. The idiom functions both literally and as an emotional signal. Teaching this idiom can lead to discussions about indirect speech and euphemism in English.

“Too busy being yours”

This is one of the most expressive idioms in the song. It suggests that the persona is so emotionally occupied with someone that they cannot focus on anything else. “Being yours” conveys ownership or complete emotional involvement. The expression reveals dependency and obsession. Semantically, this phrase is powerful because it compresses a complex emotional attachment into five words. In the classroom, this could be an entry point to discuss emotional dependency and metaphorical expression in relationships.

“Been wondering”

Although seemingly simple, this idiom reflects a state of repeated questioning and mental preoccupation. The continuous form “been wondering” highlights the emotional burden of unresolved thoughts. It is not just curiosity; it’s obsession. Contextually, it represents internal conflict. Learners can misread this as simple questioning unless taught to interpret tone, repetition, and lyrical buildup.

“Ever thought of calling?”

This question reflects more than just an inquiry. It expresses hope, insecurity, and longing. The idiom suggests that the speaker is unsure whether the other person shares the same feelings. It implies emotional hesitation and fear of rejection. In teaching, this line can be used to explore how grammar and pragmatics work together to convey emotion beyond structure.

“Fall for somebody new”

This idiom uses the physical action of falling to represent the emotional process of falling in love. In the context of the song, it suggests fear that the other person has moved on. The phrase

blends metaphor with emotional comparison. It is commonly used in daily English but in the song, it reflects jealousy and self-doubt. Students can benefit from contrasting this with similar expressions like “head over heels” or “catch feelings.”

Pedagogical Implications

The use of idioms in songs offers an effective method to teach real-world English. These idioms are emotionally loaded, culturally embedded, and often appear in casual, authentic speech. Students are more likely to remember phrases like “crawling back” than definitions from textbooks. Moreover, the emotional context helps learners make meaningful associations.

Teachers can design activities around these idioms, such as:

Matching idioms to emotions

Interpreting lyrics in group discussions

Comparing idioms from different songs

Translating idioms into students' first language and analyzing differences

Integrating song lyrics into EFL classrooms helps students appreciate the richness of figurative language while also building listening, reading, and interpretive skills. Additionally, it provides low-cost and high-engagement material suitable for diverse educational settings.

Cultural Interpretation of Idioms

Idiomatic expressions are not merely linguistic constructs but are also deeply rooted in cultural perspectives. The idioms found in “Do I Wanna Know?” reflect British cultural tendencies toward emotional understatement, indirectness, and metaphorical subtlety. For instance, the phrase “had a few” may seem like a neutral reference to alcohol, but in British culture, it signals a condition in which one's emotional guard is lowered. Understanding the cultural context in which idioms are used helps learners grasp not only the meaning but also the social appropriateness of expressions. EFL educators should integrate cultural notes when teaching idioms to prevent misinterpretation and promote pragmatic awareness.

Comparative Example from Another Song

A brief comparison can be drawn with Adele's “Hello”, which also uses idioms such

as “break your heart” and “go over everything” to convey emotional vulnerability and regret. Although the stylistic tone differs, both songs utilize idiomatic language to encapsulate complex feelings of longing and loss. By analyzing multiple songs, learners can identify idiomatic patterns and recognize how figurative expressions vary depending on context, speaker intention, and cultural framing. This comparative approach can deepen learners’ ability to interpret figurative language in various genres.

Common Challenges in Understanding Idioms

EFL learners often struggle to comprehend idioms because they try to analyze them literally. For example, “crawling back to you” may be interpreted as physical movement rather than emotional submission. Such misinterpretation stems from a lack of exposure to authentic contexts and insufficient cultural background knowledge. Research by Teng (2018) and Harmer (2015) also highlights that idiomatic comprehension requires both repetition and emotional engagement. Teachers need to create activities that allow learners to repeatedly engage with idioms in emotionally resonant contexts, such as through music or drama. By addressing these challenges explicitly in the classroom, the gap between literal and figurative understanding can be bridged.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that “Do I Wanna Know?” contains idiomatic expressions that are rich in emotional and contextual meaning. These idioms are not random; they serve specific purposes in expressing the speaker’s psychological state. For EFL learners, analyzing idioms through songs can be a meaningful way to learn. Lyrics are accessible, relatable, and full of real expressions that students might not find in textbooks. Teaching idioms through music is not only effective but also enjoyable and low-cost. Future research could apply this method in classrooms to evaluate its practical use, or compare idioms across music genres. Furthermore, this research emphasizes that understanding idioms involves more than literal translation; it requires learners to engage with cultural, emotional, and contextual cues. By incorporating authentic texts like song lyrics into classroom instruction, teachers not only enhance vocabulary acquisition but also develop students' intercultural competence. Future studies are encouraged to expand this framework by applying the same method to different genres or comparing idioms across regional English varieties. This study also contributes to the growing body of research that connects language learning with popular culture. It shows how music can serve not only as entertainment but also as a pedagogical tool. Teachers who are willing to

integrate song analysis into their lessons can enhance students' motivation and deepen their engagement with the language. Future research may explore how students' interpretation of idioms develops over time with sustained exposure to figurative language in music. It is recommended that English teachers integrate popular songs like "Do I Wanna Know?" into teaching materials to enhance students' understanding of idioms in a meaningful and culturally rich context. Further research could compare idiomatic expressions across genres or among different English dialects.

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