A Classification Idiomatic Expression in Taylor Swift by Song Lyric

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the intricate use of language in Taylor Swift's critically acclaimed album Red, with a particular emphasis on idiomatic expressions as a medium of communication and artistic expression. Language serves as a fundamental instrument of human interaction, allowing individuals to articulate nuanced thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences. Through the lens of idiomatic language, this study explores how figurative expressions contribute to the emotional depth and narrative power of song lyrics. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes selected tracks from the album to identify various idioms, classify their types, and interpret their contextual meanings. The analysis reveals that idiomatic expressions are not only stylistic devices but also key components in constructing relatable and emotionally resonant messages for the audience. Moreover, the study highlights how Swift's lyrical choices reflect broader cultural and linguistic patterns, illustrating the interplay between personal storytelling and universal themes. Ultimately, the findings underscore the significance of idioms in enhancing the poetic and communicative dimensions of popular music, positioning language as both an expressive and interpretive force in the domain of contemporary songwriting.

Keywords: Idiomatic Expressions; "Red" Album; Song Lyrics Analysis; Language and Communication

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental means of communication that enables human beings to express ideas, share emotions, and interact socially in all aspects of life, such as when playing, conversing, collaborating, and learning. It is a dynamic, ever-present force that surrounds us in virtually every activity, shaping not only our individual identities but also our social and cultural relationships. Without language, human interaction would be severely limited, making it difficult to transfer knowledge, resolve conflicts, or form meaningful connections. According to Harmer (2007, as cited in Hariyanto, 2017), language is widely used as a bridge for communication among people who do not share the same first or even second language. This

reinforces the idea that language is not merely a system of words and grammar, but a living, evolving tool that facilitates mutual understanding and global communication.

Human language is uniquely complex and distinguished from other forms of communication in the animal kingdom by several characteristics, including productivity (the ability to create an infinite number of expressions), recursiveness (the embedding of structures within structures), and displacement (the capacity to discuss things that are not present in time or space). These features are deeply influenced by social learning and shaped by cultural conventions. Furthermore, the meaning derived from a word or phrase is highly context-dependent; the same expression can convey different interpretations depending on the situation, speaker intention, and listener perception.

Linguistics, the scientific study of language, is concerned with understanding these processes and mechanisms. Often referred to as general linguistics, the field does not restrict itself to analyzing one language but rather investigates the nature, structure, and function of language universally. It encompasses phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics—all of which contribute to how language is produced, interpreted, and evolves over time. In essence, linguistics helps us understand how language functions not only as a code but as a complex, symbolic system used for meaning making.

Among the many domains where language takes on a highly expressive and artistic role is in music and song lyrics. Music is a universal form of expression, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers, and song lyrics serve as an important vehicle through which emotions, stories, and social messages are conveyed. Lyrics often contain metaphorical and idiomatic language, which can add layers of meaning and emotional depth. In the realm of popular music, few artists have demonstrated such mastery of lyricism as Taylor Swift, an American singer-songwriter known for her ability to articulate personal and relatable experiences through poetic and impactful language.

This study focuses specifically on Red (Taylor's Version), Swift's 2021 re-release of her critically acclaimed 2012 album. The album comprises songs that explore themes of love, heartbreak, identity, and transformation. Through her distinctive songwriting style, Swift frequently employs idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and symbolic language that invite interpretation and evoke strong emotional responses from listeners. These idioms often carry cultural significance and may not always be understood literally, yet they contribute to the richness and relatability of the songs.

By examining idioms found in the lyrics of Red (Taylor's Version), this research aims to explore how songwriters embed layered meanings into their work using language that is both culturally embedded and emotionally evocative. The idiomatic expressions identified in Swift's lyrics serve not only a poetic function but also a

linguistic one illustrating how figurative language enhances communication and artistic expression. Moreover, the study seeks to demonstrate how idioms in song lyrics can serve as an effective medium for language learning and literary analysis, thus contributing to both linguistic and literary scholarship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Idioms and Their Significance in Language

Idioms are combinations of words whose meanings cannot be directly inferred from their literal definitions. These expressions often arise from everyday cultural references and carry meanings that differ significantly from their dictionary interpretations. O'Dell and McCarthy (2010) define idioms as fixed combinations of words whose overall meaning is frequently difficult to predict by simply analyzing the individual components. Šarić (2022) supports this view by explaining that idiomatic expressions are complex lexical items whose meanings are not deducible from their parts. Similarly, Zeng and Bhat (2021) describe idiomatic expressions as unique sequences of English words or phrases that convey figurative rather than literal meanings. As rhetorical devices, idioms belong to a broader group of figures of speech, including metaphors, hyperbole, proverbs, and euphemisms. These devices enhance both spoken and written communication by adding vividness, emotional depth, or cultural familiarity. Despite their widespread use, especially in songs and popular media, many listeners remain unaware of the idiomatic expressions embedded within the lyrics or their communicative significance.

Types of Idioms

According to O'Dell and McCarthy (2010), idioms can be classified into several distinct types based on their structure and function. Similes are expressions that draw comparisons using the words "like" or "as," such as "Her cheeks are red like apples." Binomials are fixed phrases composed of two linked words connected by conjunctions, exemplified by expressions like "life and death." Proverbs consist of brief, traditional sayings that convey advice or general truths, for example, "Every cloud has a silver lining." Euphemisms serve as polite substitutes for harsh or unpleasant terms; for instance, "made the ultimate sacrifice" is a euphemistic way to say someone has died. Clichés are overused phrases that have lost originality and impact, such as "Time is money." Fixed statements are commonly used expressions in everyday speech, like "See you!" Lastly, idioms borrowed from other languages, especially Latin or French, enrich English with expressions like "Il est doux comme un agneau," meaning someone is gentle like a lamb. Understanding these categories helps elucidate the diversity and richness of idiomatic language.

Semantic Perspectives on Meaning

The concept of meaning encompasses a wide range of interpretations, extending beyond the realm of semantics. Leech offers a comprehensive framework dividing meaning into several types, including conceptual, connotative, social, affective (or emotive), reflected, collocative, and thematic meanings. This multidimensional approach allows for a deeper understanding of how idioms operate not only at the grammatical level but also emotionally and culturally. For example, idioms often carry social meanings that reflect cultural values or affective meanings that express emotional states. By exploring these semantic categories, researchers can better appreciate the nuanced ways idiomatic expressions convey speaker intent and shape listener interpretation in communication.

Song Lyrics as Linguistic and Literary Medium

Song lyrics function as a unique medium that blends linguistic expression with literary artistry, designed to evoke strong emotions and communicate complex ideas. Wahyudi (2006) observes that idioms are prevalent in Western songs, and exposure to these idiomatic expressions through music can facilitate language learning. Simanjuntak et al. (2021) emphasize that music serves as an effective communicative tool, transmitting emotions, ideas, and thoughts through a structured combination of sound and language. Dallin (as cited in Firdaus, 2013) defines lyrics as printed forms of communication that create a connection between the writer and the reader or listener, bridging emotional and intellectual experiences. Through repeated exposure to idiomatic expressions within lyrics, listeners develop a subconscious familiarity with figurative language, which enhances both their appreciation of the music and their linguistic competence.

Taylor Swift's Use of Idiomatic Language

Taylor Swift's album Red (Taylor's Version) offers a rich terrain for linguistic analysis, particularly because of her skillful use of idiomatic expressions throughout the lyrics. Swift's songwriting blends narrative storytelling with metaphorical and idiomatic language to capture complex emotions such as heartbreak, nostalgia, and personal growth. This study aims to identify the idioms present in the album's lyrics, interpret their meanings, and classify their types. By doing so, the research contributes to linguistic theory and provides practical insights for language learning, illustrating how idiomatic language in popular music can enrich both artistic expression and communicative effectiveness.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design, which is well-suited to exploring and uncovering meanings behind phenomena that may not be

immediately understood by many people. The qualitative descriptive method allows the researcher to provide a detailed and rich description of idiomatic expressions found in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Red album, capturing the contextual meanings embedded in the songs. The population for this study consists of all the songs featured in Taylor Swift's Red (Taylor's Version) album. For selecting the sample, the study uses purposive sampling, a deliberate technique chosen to identify the most relevant data for the research objectives. According to Arifin (2020), purposive sampling is a method that selects samples based on specific criteria, ensuring that the chosen samples are appropriate for the study. Neuendorf (n.d.) further clarifies that purposive sampling aims to select the right sample to serve as the core research material. Based on this, songs containing idiomatic expressions from the Red album were carefully identified and selected for analysis.

Instrument and Procedures

The primary instruments for data collection include audio recordings of the songs from Taylor Swift's Red album and their corresponding lyrics, obtained from reliable online sources. The data gathering process began with downloading all the songs from the album and retrieving their official lyrics and scripts. The researcher then carefully listened to each song multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding and accurate identification of idiomatic expressions. The lyrics were examined line by line to spot idiomatic phrases or sentences. Once identified, these idiomatic expressions were categorized according to their types based on established classifications from the literature. The process also involved interpreting the meanings of these idioms within the context of the songs to grasp the intended emotional and figurative messages conveyed by the songwriter.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a systematic four-step process of data reduction. First, the researcher listened attentively to each song on the Red album to familiarize themselves with the content and delivery. Second, a detailed examination of the lyrics was conducted to identify idiomatic expressions, carefully distinguishing these from literal language. Third, the researcher selected only those songs that contained idiomatic expressions, since not every song in the album featured such language. Finally, the researcher recorded and documented all idiomatic expressions identified within the selected songs, noting the specific words or phrases and their contextual meanings. This process allowed the researcher to organize the data efficiently and prepare it for further interpretation and discussion, highlighting the role and significance of idioms in Taylor Swift's songwriting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The information is derived from the lyrics of four songs from Taylor Swift's recent album Red. Those songs which are going to be analyzed are All to Well, begin agains, 22 and Red. Data from the four songs on Taylor Swift's Red album are

evaluated using a set of processes. Step one involves analyzing and reading the song from the first line to the end. Step two involves describing or identifying different types of idioms and marking the data with bold. Step three involves explaining the data. Step four involves writing the idiom in each song's lyrics. Finally, the Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal verb by Richard is used to provide the meaning of the idiom. The author provides examples of idioms in four of Taylor Swift's songs from her Red album.

Song Title	No	Idiom
All too well	1	I walked through the door with you
	2	The cards you had in your hands
	3	Time won't fly, it's like im paralyzed by it
	4	I remember it all too well
Begin agains	5	You're just like a dream
	6	I've been waiting for a sign
	7	I've been spending the last eight months thinking all love ever does is break and burn and end
	8	But you throw your head back laughing like a little kid
22	9	We're happy free, confused, and lonely at the same time
	10	It feels like a perfect night
	12	Just keep dancing like you're 22
	13	Forget about the heartbreaks
Red	14	Loving him is like driving a new Maserati down a dead-end street
	15	Remembering him comes in flashbacks and echoes
	16	All the colors were in the dark
	17	Like the colors in autumn, so bright just before they lose it all
	18	You gave me butterflies

This study investigates idiomatic expressions in four selected songs—*All Too Well*, *Begin Again*, *22*, and *Red*—from Taylor Swift's *Red* album (Taylor's Version), providing a nuanced linguistic and literary analysis that contributes novel insights into the intersection of idiomatic language and contemporary songwriting. While previous research has explored idioms in various media (e.g., films, prose, and traditional poetry), this study is innovative in its focused application to modern popular music lyrics, particularly those of a globally influential artist like Taylor Swift. The research demonstrates how idiomatic expressions enrich narrative depth and emotional resonance, aligning with findings by scholars such as Chen and Chen (2017), who emphasized the role of figurative language in music for emotional communication.

The identified idioms in Swift's lyrics ranging from similes to fixed expressions function as key rhetorical devices that convey complex feelings and abstract ideas. This aligns with the work of Yuliana et al. (2020), who showed that idiomatic expressions in song lyrics facilitate deeper audience engagement by providing culturally and emotionally rich contexts. The metaphors such as "driving a new Maserati down a dead-end street" (Red) reflect the bittersweet complexity of love, supporting findings by Liu and Zhang (2019), who argued that metaphorical language in songs often encapsulates paradoxical emotions.

Further, the idiomatic use in *All Too Well* and *Begin Again* supports the observations by Nurdiani and Wahyuni (2021) that idioms effectively communicate nuanced emotional transitions, from heartbreak to hope. Similarly, the youthful exuberance idioms in *22* correspond with the studies of Prasetyo et al. (2018), highlighting idioms' role in capturing sociocultural experiences of identity and growth in youth.

This research builds on earlier works by Nuraini et al. (2016) and Zahra and Putri (2017), who explored idiomatic language as a medium for emotional and cultural expression in literary texts, extending the concept to popular music lyrics. Moreover, it complements the investigations by Putri et al. (2022) and Sari and Gunawan (2023), which illustrated idioms' pivotal role in enhancing the aesthetics and communicative effectiveness of contemporary lyrical compositions. Despite the richness of idiomatic expressions, the study also echoes concerns from Mustika and Kurniawan (2020) about potential misinterpretations of idioms due to cultural differences, which may affect listener reception across diverse audiences. This points to the importance of cultural literacy in fully appreciating idiomatic language in global music contexts.

This study contributes significantly to the fields of applied linguistics, literary studies, and musicology by elucidating how idiomatic expressions function within popular music lyrics as vehicles of emotional expression and cultural storytelling. For language educators, the findings suggest that integrating song lyrics rich in idiomatic language into teaching materials can enhance learners' pragmatic competence and cultural awareness, corroborating recommendations by Rahayu and Adi (2019). For lyricists and music producers, this research highlights the artistic power of idioms in creating emotionally compelling content that resonates widely.

However, the study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to four songs from a single album, which may not represent the full range of idiomatic usage across Taylor Swift's discography or other musical genres. Second, the interpretation of idioms is inherently subjective and dependent on cultural and contextual knowledge; hence, listener interpretations might vary significantly. Finally, this qualitative approach does not quantify the frequency or comparative

impact of idiomatic expressions relative to other lyrical devices, which could be addressed in future mixed-method or corpus-based research.

CONCLUSION

The importance of language and idioms in communication is examined in this article, with special reference to Taylor Swift's album "Red." It highlights how important language is to human interaction since it enables people to successfully communicate their ideas and feelings. The study emphasises idioms phrases whose meanings cannot be inferred from the individual words and how often they are in song lyrics, as well as how they might improve lyrical expression. The study analyses idiomatic terms in four chosen songs from the "Red" album using a qualitative descriptive method. The researcher recognises different kinds of idioms and classifies their meanings by listening to the songs and looking at the lyrics. In addition to showcasing Swift's song writing's depth, this research shows how idioms can enhance the listening experience by expressing nuanced concepts and feelings. The article's conclusion emphasises how crucial it is to comprehend idiomatic language in music in order to enhance one's appreciation of artistic expression. It proves that songs like those in "Red" are a potent tool for emotional connection and communication in addition to being a source of enjoyment.

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