

An analysis of idioms found in ‘Green Book’ movie directed by Peter Farrelly

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Idiom, Green Book, Frame Semantics

Kata Kunci:

Idioms, Green Book, Kerangka Semantik

This study focuses on analyzing idioms in Green Book, directed by Peter Farrelly. Idioms are expressions with figurative meanings different from their literal words. The research aims to identify, classify, and analyze idioms in the film and understand their contextual use. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, idioms were classified into pure, semi-, and literal categories. Results show idioms portray characters and social dynamics and help English learners understand real-life communication in film dialogue. Applying Fillmore’s Frame Semantics theory, the study explains how idioms support interpretation and comprehension. Pure idioms like “Who had the balls to” indicate figurative complexity; semi-idioms like “Grand old time” combine literal and figurative meanings; literal idioms like “Pull over” reflect realistic speech patterns. Overall, idioms enrich dialogue, reinforce character development, and emphasize themes of cultural identity and power relations..

ABSTRAK

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in communication, as it allows individuals to convey thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Among various forms of language use, idiomatic expressions hold a unique position due to their figurative meanings, which often deviate

from the literal meanings of the words involved. Idioms are pervasive in daily conversation and media, making their understanding essential for effective communication. Cooper (2019, p. 105) emphasizes that idioms are an integral part of language proficiency because they enrich communicative ability for both native and non-native speakers. Despite their importance, idioms can be challenging for English learners, especially when they appear within culturally diverse contexts such as films. Films provide realistic and dynamic language exposure, making them valuable resources for exploring idiomatic expressions in authentic situations.

In linguistic studies, idioms have been widely discussed from various perspectives. Saberian and Fotofatina (2011) define idioms as multiword units consisting of two or more words functioning as meaningful inseparable units. Similarly, Borah and Sharma (2016) describe idioms as groups of words carrying special meanings shaped by common usage. Baker (2000) further explains that idioms are frozen patterns of language with little variation and meanings that cannot be deduced from their individual components. This characteristic explains why idioms are difficult to interpret literally. For example, the expression “not to breathe a word” means to keep a secret rather than its literal sense (Fotofatina & Goudarzi, 2014). Such expressions demonstrate how idiomatic meaning diverges from literal meaning, creating challenges for non-native speakers. Baker (2011) also notes that idioms sometimes appear ill-formed grammatically, adding to their complexity. Therefore, idioms can be understood as multiword expressions whose meanings are not directly predictable from their component words.

To facilitate comprehension and analysis, idioms can be classified into categories. Fernando (1996) proposes three types of idioms: pure, semi-, and literal idioms. Pure idioms are non-literal expressions whose individual words do not contribute to the overall meaning. Semi-idioms contain both literal and non-literal elements, allowing partial interpretation from their components (Weinreich, 1969; Cowie, 1981 cited in Fernando, 1996). Literal idioms, on the other hand, are transparent and can be interpreted from their constituent meanings, often showing restricted variation. This classification provides a framework for identifying idiomatic patterns in language data.

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Understanding idioms also requires attention to meaning from a semantic perspective. Semantics concerns aspects of meaning in language, and Chaer (2007) distinguishes several kinds of meaning, including lexical, grammatical, contextual, referential, denotative, connotative, conceptual, associative meaning, and lexeme. Lexical meaning refers to dictionary meaning, while grammatical meaning emerges from morphological or syntactic processes. Contextual meaning depends on the situation in which words are used, whereas referential meaning relates to reference to entities. Denotative meaning represents literal sense, and connotative meaning reflects emotional or cultural associations. Conceptual meaning denotes the core sense of a lexeme, while associative meaning connects language with symbolic social interpretation. The notion of lexeme itself refers to abstract morphological units whose forms are governed by grammatical rules. These categories illustrate that meaning interpretation extends beyond literal definitions and is shaped by context and linguistic structure.

Contextual meaning plays a particularly significant role in interpreting idioms. Lyons (1984) describes contextual meaning as meaning determined by the situations in which words are used, while Crystal (1991) associates it with information conveyed in social contexts. Leech (1983) further highlights that context includes shared background knowledge between speaker and hearer that contributes to interpretation. Thus, meaning is influenced by situational use, and identical words may convey different interpretations depending on context. This perspective is essential for analyzing idioms within film dialogue, where meaning is shaped by narrative, character interaction, and social setting.

Films have been recognized as effective tools for language learning and idiom acquisition. Movie dialogue frequently contains phrasal verbs, idioms, and other natural conversational forms, offering practical exposure for learners. Khosyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) demonstrate that teaching idiomatic expressions through movies is enjoyable and less demanding for learners, indicating the pedagogical value of audiovisual media. Consequently, movies provide a meaningful platform for studying idiomatic language use.

The movie *Green Book* (2018), directed by Peter Farrelly, serves as an appropriate subject for analyzing idiomatic expressions because of its rich and colloquial dialogue. Interactions between Tony Lip and Dr. Don Shirley reflect cultural and social contrasts

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expressed through idiomatic language. Gibbs (2020, p. 240) argues that idioms are culturally embedded and reveal social relationships, power dynamics, and identity, which aligns with the linguistic portrayal in the film. Idioms in *Green Book* are not merely entertaining elements but also tools for expressing emotional complexity, social roles, and evolving interpersonal relationships.

This study therefore aims to explore the types and functions of idioms used in the film. By identifying and categorizing idiomatic expressions, the research seeks to reveal how idioms contribute to narrative structure and character development. The analysis is also intended to support English learners in understanding idioms in real communicative contexts. Applying Fillmore's Frame Semantics theory (Fillmore, 2018), which explains how idioms activate broader conceptual frames, this study examines how idiomatic expressions influence interpretation and comprehension. Ultimately, the research highlights the importance of idiomatic language in representing cultural meaning and shaping storytelling in film, while offering insights into alternative approaches for learning English idioms through cinematic media.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive quantitative design, a method chosen to align with the objectives of analyzing and interpreting the use of idiomatic expressions in the film *Green Book*. This approach allows the researcher to explore idioms' meaning and contextual implications without manipulating variables. Quantitative approach is a study that systematically examines the numerical distribution and frequency of idioms, focusing on their usage across characters and scenes. The primary subject of this study is the film *Green Book* directed by Peter Farrelly, released on November 16, 2018. The idiomatic expressions from all the characters in the film are analyzed, making the entire dialogue a key source of data. The focus is on classifying idioms into categories and interpreting their contextual meanings. The research Instrument is the film *Green Book* serves as the primary instrument for collecting data. Supporting instruments include dictionaries and a categorization checklist to systematically identify, classify, and interpret idiomatic expressions. Document analysis was the main method, which involves thoroughly reviewing the film's dialogues to extract idioms and their contextual significance.

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FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Types of Idioms in Green Book Movie

The idiomatic expressions found in Green Book were identified and categorized based on their linguistic complexity and usage in dialogue. A total of 189 idioms were collected and classified into three types: pure idioms, semi-idioms, and literal idioms, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Idioms in Green Book Movie

Type of Idiom	Frequency	Percentage
Pure Idioms	83	45.7%
Semi-Idioms	67	34.1%
Literal Idioms	39	20.2%
Total	189	100%

Table 1 shows that pure idioms are the most frequently used type, with 83 occurrences (45.7%), followed by semi-idioms with 67 occurrences (34.1%), and literal idioms with 39 occurrences (20.2%). This distribution indicates that figurative language plays a dominant role in the film's dialogue, supporting expressive and culturally nuanced communication.

Pure idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be inferred from the literal meanings of their individual components. In Green Book, pure idioms frequently appear in informal conversations and reflect the characters' cultural background and social relationships. An example is the idiom "Who had the balls to" uttered by Jilly Rizzo, which refers to courage or boldness rather than its literal interpretation. The term "balls" functions as slang representing bravery, while the overall expression conveys admiration or challenge related to daring actions. Another example, "We squashed it", spoken by Augie, indicates that a problem or conflict has been resolved. Although "squash" literally means to crush something physically, idiomatically it expresses decisive conflict resolution. These pure idioms emphasize power relations, confidence, and character traits, while also marking shifts in narrative tension and resolution.

Semi-idioms contain both literal and figurative elements, allowing partial interpretation from their components. In *Green Book*, semi-idioms are commonly used to convey humor, social identity, and informal interaction. The expression “We bringing breads?” spoken by Tony Lip illustrates this type, as “bringing” retains its literal meaning while “breads” functions as slang for women, requiring cultural understanding. Similarly, the idiom “You looking to earn some extra scharole?” combines the literal phrase “looking to earn” with “scharole,” a slang term for money. These expressions reflect the speakers’ informal, street-oriented language style and reveal social background, group affiliation, and interpersonal familiarity. Semi-idioms thus serve as linguistic markers of identity and social dynamics within the film.

Literal idioms are expressions whose meanings can be understood directly from their component words, though they remain fixed in form. In the film, literal idioms are often used in straightforward dialogue to give advice or describe conditions. The idiom “Do yourself a favor” is an example, as its words retain their literal meanings but function pragmatically as advice or a warning. Tony Lip’s use of this expression reflects his direct and assertive communication style. Another example is “I’m flush right now,” which literally refers to abundance and is commonly understood as having plenty of money. This expression highlights Tony’s temporary financial stability and his awareness of fluctuating economic conditions. Literal idioms in *Green Book* contribute to realism in dialogue while reinforcing character traits and social positioning.

Overall, the analysis shows that idioms in *Green Book* function not only as linguistic expressions but also as tools for character development, social interaction, and narrative progression. The varied use of pure, semi-, and literal idioms strengthens the authenticity of the dialogue and reflects cultural, economic, and relational aspects of the characters’ lives.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of idioms in the narrative has revealed distinct patterns and functions based on the categorization into Pure Idioms, Semi-Idioms, and Literal Idioms. Each category showcases unique characteristics that contribute to the overall communication style of the characters, reflecting their personalities, cultural backgrounds, and social dynamics. Understanding these idiom types not only enhances comprehension of

An analysis of idioms found in 'Green Book' movie directed by Peter Farrelly character interactions but also provides deeper insight into the thematic elements and narrative techniques employed in the text.

In Green Book movie, pure, semi, and literal idioms illustrate the characters' linguistic creativity and adaptability, each serving distinct narrative functions. Pure idioms, like "Who had the balls to" and "Breakin' my balls," are entirely figurative, adding layers of complexity to the dialogue through their non-literal meanings that convey bravery, frustration, and interpersonal dynamics. This opacity requires contextual understanding and often signals informality, humor, or confrontation, aligning with the characters' navigation of socially tense or humorous situations. Semi-idioms, such as "We bringing breads?" and "Grand old time," balance literal and figurative elements, blending familiar words with subtle cultural connotations. This category reflects how characters adapt language to express identities, desires, and social affiliations, emphasizing their ability to code-switch based on context. Finally, literal idioms like "Pull over" and "Eyes are stingin'" are straightforward in meaning, directly tied to physical or situational contexts. These idioms enhance narrative realism by mirroring authentic speech patterns and enabling immediate understanding, thus allowing audiences to connect with the characters' concrete, sensory experiences. Together, these idiomatic forms deepen the film's subtext, exposing nuanced emotional undertones, cultural norms, and social dynamics.

In conclusion, the varied use of idioms across these three categories reflects the complex interplay between language, character, and context. Pure Idioms offer a glimpse into the characters' deeper emotions and social dynamics through figurative language, Semi-Idioms bridge literal and figurative meaning to reveal social nuances, and Literal Idioms maintain clarity and directness in communication. Together, these idioms enrich the narrative by adding depth to the dialogue, shaping character identities, and emphasizing the broader themes of cultural identity, power dynamics, and social interaction. The strategic use of these idioms underscores the importance of understanding language as a multifaceted tool that shapes not only what is said but also how it is interpreted within the story's socio-cultural framework.

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