24. JLLSCS-NOV'26. Wjijayanti_Beyond the Literal Challenges and Strategies in Translating Idiomatic Expressions (288-297)....

Politeknik Negeri Bali

Document Details

Submission ID
trn:oid:::3618:148914026

Submission Date
Aug 21, 2026, 8:09 AM GMT+8

Download Date
Aug 21, 2026, 8:11 AM GMT+8

File Name
24. JLLSCS-NOV'26. Wjijayanti_Beyond the Literal Challenges and Strategies in Translating Idioma....pdf

File Size
158.6 KB

10 Pages

3,501 Words

18,746 Characters

0% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

Filtered from the Report

- Bibliography
- Small Matches (less than 18 words)

Match Groups

0 Not Cited or Quoted 0%
Matches with neither in-text citation nor quotation marks

0 Missing Quotations 0%
Matches that are still very similar to source material

0 Missing Citation 0%
Matches that have quotation marks, but no in-text citation

0 Cited and Quoted 0%
Matches with in-text citation present, but no quotation marks

Top Sources

0% Internet sources
0% Publications
0% Submitted works (Student Papers)

Integrity Flags

0 Integrity Flags for Review

No suspicious text manipulations found.

Our system's algorithms look deeply at a document for any inconsistencies that would set it apart from a normal submission. If we notice something strange, we flag it for you to review.

A Flag is not necessarily an indicator of a problem. However, we'd recommend you focus your attention there for further review.

Match Groups

0 Not Cited or Quoted 0%
Matches with neither in-text citation nor quotation marks

0 Missing Quotations 0%
Matches that are still very similar to source material

0 Missing Citation 0%
Matches that have quotation marks, but no in-text citation

0 Cited and Quoted 0%
Matches with in-text citation present, but no quotation marks

Top Sources

0% Internet sources
0% Publications
0% Submitted works (Student Papers)

Beyond the literal: Challenges and strategies in translating idiomatic expressions in popular English songs into Indonesian

Made Ayu Berliana Wijayanti

English for Business and Professional Communication Dept., Politeknik Negeri Bali
Email: ayuberli4na@gmail.com

Abstract - The translation of song lyrics involves not only linguistic conversion but also the preservation of cultural nuances, emotional resonance, and figurative meanings. This study explores the complexities of translating English idiomatic expressions into Indonesian, focusing on how literal translations fail to convey the source text's true essence. Employing a qualitative research design with a document study method, this research analyzes the complete lyrics of Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off" and Katy Perry's "Wide Awake." The idioms embedded within these tracks were systematically identified and evaluated against potential literal translations to demonstrate their semantic inadequacy. The findings reveal that literal translations distort the songwriters' underlying messages, causing syntactic awkwardness and pragmatic loss. Consequently, alternative translation strategies, such as paraphrasing and idiomatic equivalence, are required to ensure naturalness and accuracy in the target language. This study highlights the imperative role of cultural awareness and functional equivalence in song translation, proving that a word-for-word approach diminishes the artistic and communicative value of musical texts.

Keywords: idiom translation, song lyrics, qualitative analysis, cultural equivalence, literal translation failure

1. Introduction

Song lyrics represent a unique and complex form of literature that fuses linguistic elements, poetic devices, and musical rhythm to convey deep emotional and narrative messages. When a song travels across cultural and linguistic boundaries, however, these messages are frequently distorted or lost entirely. This translation barrier becomes particularly pronounced when songwriters employ idiomatic expressions, which are phrases whose meanings cannot be understood simply by looking at the literal definitions of their individual words. Instead, an idiom relies on shared cultural agreements and contextual usage within a specific language community, making it highly resistant to direct decoding by non-native speakers.

In the translation of English pop songs into Indonesian, translators and listeners often default to literal, word-for-word translation. While this literal approach can successfully convey purely denotative texts, it causes massive semantic breakdowns when applied to figurative structures. In the context of musical compositions—where structural constraints such as rhythm, rhyme, and emotional resonance are vital—a failed literal translation does more than just confuse the target audience; it completely strips away the songwriter's artistic vision and poetic impact. To illustrate this linguistic friction, this paper examines two highly popular contemporary pop songs: Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off" (2014) and Katy Perry's "Wide Awake" (2012). Both tracks are heavily saturated with idioms that depict themes of resilience, self-realization, and overcoming deception, making them ideal specimens for a comparative linguistic study.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the distinct challenges of translating English idiomatic expressions into Indonesian to demonstrate that figurative language cannot be translated literally. To achieve this, the study documents the complete, unabridged lyrics of both songs as a primary dataset to ensure no contextual cues are lost. It then systematically isolates and identifies the key idiomatic expressions embedded within these tracks, contrasting potential word-for-word Indonesian translations with contextually accurate, culturally equivalent alternatives. Through this detailed comparative analysis, this research aims to provide an in-depth linguistic evaluation that illustrates why literal translation is inadequate for translating musical texts, ultimately advocating for a translation methodology that prioritizes functional equivalence and cultural naturalness in the target language.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach featuring a document study (content analysis) design. Qualitative research is optimal for this investigation as it centers on understanding meaning, text nuances, and cultural translations rather than statistical data. The primary documents analyzed are the complete, official text lyrics of the songs "Shake It Off" (2014) by Taylor Swift and "Wide Awake" (2012) by Katy Perry.

The research was conducted through the following steps:

2.2 Data Collection: Gathering and transcribing the complete, unabridged lyrics of both selected songs to ensure contextual integrity.

Data Identification: Scanning the corpus of the lyrics to highlight and extract phrases functioning as idiomatic expressions.

2.3 Data Analysis

Comparative Analysis: Translating the identified idioms via two distinct approaches: a word-for-word literal approach and a contextual/idiomatic approach.

Evaluation: Discussing the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic distortions caused by literal translation, utilizing established translation theories (e.g., Mona Baker's taxonomy of translation strategies) to formulate optimal Indonesian alternatives.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The primary data gathered consists of the absolute full lyrics of both songs. Idiomatic expressions embedded within the text are highlighted in bold and indexed with numbers (e.g., [Idiom N]) for subsequent analysis in the discussion section.

Table 1: Translation Contrast for Shake It Off - Taylor Swift"

Index	Source Idiom	Literal Translation (Indonesian)	Contextual / Idiomatic Equivalent	Semantic Analysis / Failure of Literal Translation
Idiom 1	Got nothing in my brain	Tidak punya apa-apa di otak saya	Otak kosong / bodoh / tidak berpikir	Literally suggests physical emptiness inside the skull, missing the figurative reference to being mindless or simple-minded
Idiom 2	Cruising	Berlayar / Menjelajah	Melaju terus / Santai menjalani hidup	Berlayar" spunds restricted to maritime contexts, whereas Taylor Swift uses it to mean moving along smoothly and effortlessly
Idiom 3	Players gonna	Pemain akan	Buaya	A literal translation sounds like sports

	play	bemain	darat akan terus beraksi	terminology. Contextually, “players“ refers to deceitful people or womanizers.
Idiom 4	Haters gonna hate	Pembenci akan membenci	Prencela akan selalu mencela	Grammatically acceptable literally, but it loses the rhythmic colloquial force; “pencela“ fits the ongoing nature of toxic critics.
Idiom 5	Shake it off	Mengocoknya lepas	Mengabaik an-nya	“Mengocoknya lepas“ makes no linguistic sense in Indonesian. The expression means to dismiss or rid oneself of negative energy.
Idiom 6	Heartbreakers gonna break	Penghancur hati akan hancur	Penyakit hati akan terus menyakiti	Literal translation misses the object; it implies the heartbreakers themselves break, rather than them breaking others' hearts.
Idiom 7	Fakers gonna fake	Pemalsu akan memalsukan	Orang munafik akan terus berpura-pura	“Pemalsu“ typically links to counterfeit goods. Contextually, it implies insincere people, making “munafik“ more accurate.
Idiom 8	Never miss a beat	Tidak pernah melewatkan ketukan	Selalu sigap / Tidak pernah lengah	The literal phrase points strictly to musical timing, whereas it figuratively indicates being highly alert, sharp, and focused.
Idiom 9	Lightning on my feet	Petir di kaki saya	Lincah sekali	“Petir di kaki“ creates an absurd visual image of electrocution, obscuring the idiom's true meaning of agility and speed.
Idiom 10	Getting down and out	Turun dan keluar	Terpuruk / Putus Asa	Translating these prepositions literally yields a spatial direction that completely obscures the emotional state of depression.
Idiom 11	Sick beat	Irama sakit	Irama yang keren	“Irama sakit“ implies a defective or morbid musical track, failing to translate the slang meaning where “sick“ denotes excellence.

Table 2: Translation Contrast for “Wide Awake“

Index	Source Idiom	Literal Translation (Indonesian)	Contextual / Idiomatic Equivalent	Semantic Analysis / Failure of Literal Translation
Idiom 12	Wide Awake	Terjaga lebar	Sudah sadar sepenuhnya	“Terjaga lebar“ sounds like an unnatural physical description of eyes. Katy Perry refers to a state of mental awakening
Idiom 13	In the dark	Di dalam gelap	Buta situasi (Tidak tahu	“Di dalam gelap“ implies a physical lack of light, missing the cognitive state of

			apa-apa)	being uninformed or deceived.
Idiom 14	Read the stars	Membaca bintang-bintang	Meramal nasib	Literal translation turns a metaphorical tool for destiny and evaluation into the physical act of looking at astronomical objects.
Idiom 15	Dive in	Menyelam ke dalam	Terburu-buru bertindak	"Menyelam" implies entering water. Figuratively, it denotes committing to a relationship or situation too quickly without caution.
Idiom 16	Bow down	Membungkuk ke bawah	Tunduk/Menyerah	Translating both words literally creates redundancy ("membungkuk ke bawah"). The structural intent is an act of total submission.
Idiom 17	Woke up on the concrete	Terbangun di atas beton	Tersadar oleh kenyataan pahit	A literal translation sounds like someone slept on a sidewalk, losing the dramatic impact of hitting rock bottom in reality.
Idiom 18	Cloud nine	Awan sembilan	Kebahagiaan luar biasa	"Awan sembilan" exists as a dead metaphor in Indonesian with no cultural meaning. The target equivalent must capture intense euphoria.
Idiom 19	Crashing from the high	Menabrak dari ketinggian	Tersadar dari euforia semu	"Menabrak dari ketinggian" implies a physical aviation accident instead of the psychological comedown from an emotional high.
Idiom 20	Not losing any sleep	Tidak kehilangan tidur apapun	Tidak ambil pusing	The literal text creates awkward phrasing. The idiom means the speaker is unbothered and does not worry about the ex-partner.
Idiom 21	Landed on my feet	Mendarat di kaki saya	Bangkit kembali	Fails literally because humans naturally land on feet; it loses the idiomatic nuance of surviving a crisis successfully like a cat.
Idiom 22	Out of the lion's den	Keluar dari sarang singa	Lolos dari bahaya besar	"Sarang singa" works somewhat metaphorically but translating it literally misses the biblical and historical idiom of escaping doom.
Idiom 23	Out of the blue	Keluar dari biru	Tanpa diduga	The absolute failure of literalism; "keluar dari biru" is gibberish. The phrase relates to a clear blue sky producing sudden lightning.
Idiom 24	Seeing the bright side	Melihat sisi terang	Mengambil hikmahnya	While "sisi terang" is understood via loan-translation, "mengambil hikmah" or "optimis" yields higher naturalness in target text prose.

3.1.1 Analysis of Idioms in Shake It Off"

Taylor Swift uses casual American idioms to portray a narrative of ignoring malicious gossip. Table 1 outlines the direct contrast between a failed word-for-word translation and the functional target language meaning.

Idiom 1: "Got nothing in my brain", is literally translated into *"Tidak punya apa-apa"* and the contextual or idiomatic equivalent in Indonesian is "*Otak kosong*, *bodoh*, *tidak berpikir*". A literal translation focuses on the physical meaning of *brain* as an anatomical organ and *nothing* as the absence of material content, resulting in an unnatural interpretation in Indonesian.

In the original context, however, the expression is metaphorical rather than literal. It conveys the speaker's self-deprecating claim of lacking intelligence, common sense, or meaningful thoughts, rather than implying that the brain is physically empty. The idiom relies on the conceptual metaphor that the brain represents intellect and cognitive ability. Consequently, translating it word-for-word fails to preserve its pragmatic meaning, emotional nuance, and figurative force. A contextual rendering such as *otak kosong*, *tidak berpikir*, or *bodoh* more accurately communicates the intended meaning to Indonesian readers while maintaining the expressive function of the original idiom.

3.1.2 Analysis of Idioms in "Wide Awake"

Katy Perry's ballad uses idioms focused on illusions, dreams, and sudden reality shifts. Table 2 contrasts the literal breakdowns against coherent alternatives.

3.1.3 The Failure of Literal Translation in Musical Texts

The comparison tables demonstrate a recurring trend: literal translation destroys the conceptual bridge between languages. In song lyrics, this destruction manifests in three primary dimensions:

1. Semantic Distortion and Absurdity: Phrases like "out of the blue" turns into "keluar dari biru" or "sick beat" becoming "irama sakit" produce absolute nonsense in Indonesian. The target reader is forced to decipher lexical combinations that do not conform to any logical Indonesian mental schema.

2. Loss of Pragmatic Force: An idiom like "shake it off" is meant to empower the listener. When translated word-for-word as "mengocoknya lepas," the emotional strength transitions into physical confusion. The command loses its pragmatic power to inspire resilience.

3. Destruction of Aesthetic Harmony: Songs rely heavily on flow and cultural relevance. By dragging the foreign idiom literally into Indonesian, the text feels disjointed, awkward, and distinctly non-native.

To preserve the utility of pop music across languages, translators must reject word-for-word replication and employ strategies such as paraphrasing (translating the core meaning without an idiomatic structure) or idiomatic substitution (finding an existing Indonesian idiom that carries the exact same weight).

3.2 Discussion

This section evaluates the selected phrases, demonstrating the semantic dissonance created by literal translation and proposing target language alternatives through translation strategies such as dynamic equivalence and paraphrasing.

4. Conclusion

This study confirms that translating English songs with dense idiomatic expressions into Indonesian requires moving completely away from a literal approach. Through the document study of Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off" and Katy Perry's "Wide Awake," it has been demonstrated that word-for-word translation creates semantic confusion, breaks rhythmic flow, and strips the songs of their intended emotional and poetic value. Idioms are fundamentally bound to their source cultures. Therefore, successful translation demands that the translator prioritize functional and dynamic equivalence, choosing to paraphrase the meaning naturally or substitute the phrase with an existing Indonesian idiomatic equivalent. It is recommended that future translators and

language learners approach musical texts with deep cultural awareness to prevent the structural and contextual erasures caused by literalist.

References

1. Ariyani, N., Listia, R., & Arapah, E. (2021). Students' Strategies in Translating English Idioms into Bahasa Indonesia of English Language Education. LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal, 11(2), 105–124. https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v11i2.4675
2. Fitria, L. Q., & Djauhari, O. S. (2025). Strategies and Challenges in Translating English Idioms Into Indonesian: a Case Study of The Film Up. Fonologi: Jurnal Ilmuan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris, 3(2), 327-335. https://journal.aspirasi.or.id/index.php/Fonologi/article/view/1996
3. Krisandini, M. T. K., & Sutrisno, A. (2021). The Translation of Idioms from English into Indonesian: The Case of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. Lexicon, 8(1), 24-32. https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v8i1.65904
4. Nugraha, N. A. S. (2018). Idiom Translation in English to Indonesian (A Content Analysis Research in Diary of A Wimpy Kid Jeff Kinney's Novel). KOLITA (Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya), 16, 349-351.
5. Nuraini, R., & Sayogie, F. (2024). Translation accuracy of English idiomatic expression into Indonesian in Soul film subtitle by Disney+. Linguistik Terjemahan Sastra (LINGTERSA), 5(1), 30–37. https://doi.org/10.32734/lingtersa.v5i1.12317
6. Perry, K. (2012). Wide awake [Song]. On Teenage Dream: The Complete Confection. Capitol Records.
7. Stephanie, B., & Hadi, M. Z. P. (2024). Analysis of Translation Methods for Idiomatic Phrases in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. JISHUM (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora), 3(2), 137-146. https://journal.ikmedia.id/index.php/jishum/article/view/489
8. Swift, T. (2014). Shake it off [Song]. On 1989. Big Machine Records.

Enclosure 1

Full Lyrics and Idiom Identification for Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off"

Verse 1
I stay out too late
Got nothing in my brain [Idiom 1]
That's what people say, mm-mm
That's what people say, mm-mm
I go on too many dates
But I can't make 'em stay
At least that's what people say, mm-mm
That's what people say, mm-mm

Pre-Chorus
But I keep cruising [Idiom 2]
Can't stop, won't stop moving
It's like I got this music in my mind
Saying it's gonna be alright

Chorus
'Cause the players gonna play [Idiom 3], play, play, play, play
And the haters gonna hate [Idiom 4], hate, hate, hate, hate
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off [Idiom 5], I shake it off [Idiom 5]

Heartbreakers gonna break [Idiom 6], break, break, break, break
And the fakers gonna fake [Idiom 7], fake, fake, fake, fake
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off [Idiom 5], I shake it off [Idiom 5]

Verse 2
I never miss a beat [Idiom 8]
I'm lightning on my feet [Idiom 9]
And that's what they don't see, mm-mm
And that's what they don't see, mm-mm
I'm dancing on my own (Dancing on my own)
I make the moves up as I go (Moves up as I go)
And that's what they don't know, mm-mm
And that's what they don't know, mm-mm

Pre-Chorus
But I keep cruising [Idiom 2]
Can't stop, won't stop grooving
It's like I got this music in my mind
Saying it's gonna be alright

Chorus
'Cause the players gonna play [Idiom 3], play, play, play, play
And the haters gonna hate [Idiom 4], hate, hate, hate, hate
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off [Idiom 5], I shake it off [Idiom 5]
Heartbreakers gonna break [Idiom 6], break, break, break, break
And the fakers gonna fake [Idiom 7], fake, fake, fake, fake
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off [Idiom 5], I shake it off [Idiom 5]

Refrain
Shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off

Bridge
Hey, hey, hey!
Just think while you've been getting down and out [Idiom 10] about the liars
And the dirty, dirty cheats of the world
You could've been getting down to this sick beat [Idiom 11]
My ex-man brought his new girlfriend
She's like "Oh my God!" but I'm just gonna shake
And to the fella over there with the hella good hair
Won't you come on over, baby? We can shake, shake, shake
Yeah, oh!

Chorus
'Cause the players gonna play [Idiom 3], play, play, play, play
And the haters gonna hate [Idiom 4], hate, hate, hate, hate (haters gonna hate)
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off [Idiom 5], I shake it off [Idiom 5]
Heartbreakers gonna break [Idiom 6], break, break, break, break
And the fakers gonna fake [Idiom 7], fake, fake, fake, fake (the fakers baby)
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off [Idiom 5], I shake it off [Idiom 5]

Outro
Shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
Shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
Shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off (you got to)
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off
I, I, I shake it off, I shake it off

3.1.2 Full Lyrics and Idiom Identification for Katy Perry's "Wide Awake"
Intro
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]

Verse 1
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
Yeah, I was in the dark [Idiom 13]
I was falling hard with an open heart
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
How did I read the stars [Idiom 14] so wrong?
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
And now it's clear to me
That everything you see ain't always what it seems
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
Yeah, I was dreaming for so long

Pre-Chorus
I wish I knew then what I know now
Wouldn't dive in [Idiom 15], wouldn't bow down [Idiom 16]
Gravity hurts, you made it so sweet
'Til I woke up on the concrete [Idiom 17]

Chorus

Falling from cloud nine [Idiom 18]
Crashing from the high [Idiom 19]
I'm letting go tonight
Yeah, I'm falling from cloud nine [Idiom 18]

Verse 2
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
Not losing any sleep [Idiom 20]
I picked up every piece and landed on my feet [Idiom 21]
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
Need nothing to complete myself, no
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
Yeah, I am born again, out of the lion's den [Idiom 22]
I don't have to pretend
(And it's too late)
The story's over now, the end

Pre-Chorus
I wish I knew then what I know now
Wouldn't dive in [Idiom 15], wouldn't bow down [Idiom 16]
Gravity hurts, you made it so sweet
'Til I woke up on the concrete [Idiom 17]

Chorus
Falling from cloud nine [Idiom 18] (It was out of the blue [Idiom 23], I'm)
Crashing from the high [Idiom 19]
I'm letting go tonight (Yeah, I'm letting you go, I'm)
I'm falling from cloud nine [Idiom 18]

Bridge
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
Thunder rumbling
Castles crumbling
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
I am trying to hold on
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
God knows that I tried
Seeing the bright side [Idiom 24]
(I'm wide awake [Idiom 12])
But I'm not blind anymore

Break
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]

Chorus
Yeah, I'm falling from cloud nine [Idiom 18] (It was out of the blue [Idiom 23], I'm)
Crashing from the high [Idiom 19]

You know I'm letting go tonight (Yeah, I'm letting you go, I'm)
I'm falling from cloud nine [Idiom 18]

Outro
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]
I'm wide awake [Idiom 12]