

## Idiomatic Properties in *This Is Me Letting You Go* by Heidi Priebe

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### Abstract

Nowadays, most of the youths become enthusiastic and interested in reading self-help books that can encourage them whenever they try to gain their achievements and escape from unpleasant situations. Self-help book writers use a lot of innovative words and beautiful idioms to catch the readers' attention and make them motivated. Therefore, the present research is concerned with the idiomatic properties in the self-help book. The objectives of the research are to classify the idiomatic properties in the self-help book and to investigate the effects of the idiomatic properties in the selected book. To fulfill the objectives of the research, *This Is Me Letting You Go* by Heidi Priebe is applied for collecting data, based on the theory proposed by Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994) is used as an analytical tool in the present research. It is found that conventionality fits with all the idioms in the selected book and informality is mostly found among the properties apart from conventionality. It can be said that the writer has a wide knowledge of phrasal verbs to give the right message implicitly since most of the idioms in the selected book fitting with informality are phrasal verbs. It can also be concluded that each property of idioms can highlight the message of the facts presented in the selected book to be more effective for the readers and not to be bored with reading the selected book. Finally, it can be suggested that not only written but also spoken discourse can be applied to investigate idiomatic properties to make EFL learners get better understanding of the use of idioms in their learning.

**Keywords:** connotative, figuratively, literally, semantic

### Introduction

Language is a way of expressing ideas or feelings with spoken or written words and a means of communication used by a particular group of people in the world. In order to achieve a better communication, it is necessary for the language learners to infer the meaningful expressions by means of other human beings and better comprehend in sharing their thoughts or ideas with the others. Semantics, the study of meaning, is basically critical in learning a language because it can help the learners interpret the literal meaning of a text in a language and connect with the other principles in it. With an intrinsic understanding of semantics, the learners can communicate their message with each other without misinterpretation. Especially in literary works, semantics plays an important role in presenting the message to grab the readers' fully attention and make them vividly see the direct or implied meanings of the text. The writers always highlight the meaning of

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their message to the readers with the best use of vocabularies and idioms so that the readers can feel the real essence of a text when they get a complete understanding of the underlined meanings of the idioms presented literally or figuratively.

Idiom is a group of words that has an underlined meaning different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word. Moreover, Feare (2013) stated that idiom is an expression which has a special meaning, and this meaning cannot be understood completely by looking at the individual words in the idiom. Idioms are effectively used in various written or spoken texts by the writers to express their ideas or feelings in the work. Nowadays, the use of idioms has been investigated in many different ways according to the scholars but there is still less in analyzing the properties of idioms used in a literary work, which can highlight the message of the text. Therefore, the present research is concerned with the idiomatic properties used in a self-help book, *This Is Me Letting You Go* by Heidi Priebe. Referring to Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994), there are six properties of idioms: conventionality, inflexibility, figuration, proverbiality, informality and affect.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the idiomatic properties in the self-help book by Heidi Priebe. The objectives are to classify the idiomatic properties in the selected book and to investigate the effects of idiomatic properties in the selected book. To accomplish the aim and objectives of the research, the theory proposed by Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994) was used to classify the idioms in the selected short stories into six idiomatic properties.

### **Literature Review**

Idioms play an important role as a means of living communication, making language alive, more variety in writing and speaking (Cahyono, 2005). Idioms can be found lexically or syntactically in every literary field such as newspaper, song, speech and other non-fictional works. Especially in self-help books, non-fictional ones, the writers use the different forms of idioms to present a message to the readers explicitly or implicitly.

Self-help book is a non-fiction created with the intention of motivating and instructing the readers to solve their personal problems. It plays an essential role in making the youths arouse their passion and accomplish their goals in their lives. The writers of self-help books present their information and facts with the best choice of connotative words and idioms so that the readers can meet their needs for solving the problems and get the right message from the implied meanings of the words in the book.

In this paper, a self-help book, *This Is Me Letting You Go* by Heidi Priebe, was chosen to analyze data. It was published in April 12, 2016 and written when the author was heartbroken and thirty subtitles are included in its content. The author, Heidi Priebe, was born in Ontario, Canada and she is a personality psychology freelance writer.

## Theoretical Background

In the present research, the theoretical framework of Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994) is used to analyze the idiomatic status. Six properties of idioms are mentioned as follows;

**Conventionality:** Idioms are conventionalized: their meaning or use can't be predicted, on the basis of the knowledge of the independent conventions that determine the use of their constituents when they appear in isolation from one another. For example, *He **kicked the bucket** last night* means *He **died** last night*. In this sentence, **kicked the bucket** fits with conventionality because its meaning cannot be predicted.

**Inflexibility:** Idioms typically appear only in a limited number of syntactic frames or constructions, unlike freely composed expressions. For example, in the sentence *Bryan **shoots the breeze** in his work*, **shoots the breeze** fits with inflexibility as its syntactic frame cannot be added or substituted like *The breeze is shot by Bryan*.

**Figuration:** Idioms typically involve metaphors (take the bull by the horns), metonymies (lend a hand, count heads), hyperboles (not worth the paper it's printed on), or other kinds of figuration.

**Proverbiality:** Idioms are typically used to describe\_ and implicitly, to explain\_ a recurrent situation of particular social interest (becoming restless, talking informally, divulging a secret, or whatever) in virtue of its resemblance or relation to a scenario involving homey, concrete things and relations\_ climbing walls, chewing fat, spilling beans.

**Informality:** Like other proverbial expressions, idioms are typically associated with relatively informal or colloquial registers and with popular speech and oral culture. For example, **on my own** instead of *alone*, **no way** instead of *impossible*, **ask out** instead of *invite* and so on.

**Affect:** Idioms are typically used to imply a certain evaluation or affective stance toward the things they denote. For example, **long face** meant as *a sad face*, **pull a face** or **make a face** meant as *show that someone does not like something or someone else by making an unpleasant expression*

## Related Research

*Idiomatic expressions in English: a textual analysis* conducted by Chaung Chenguang is just partially related to the present study. It aimed to study the textual function of idiomatic expressions in English, based on the analysis of authentic data of both written and spoken English. It was found that idioms have important organizational and signaling functions and they appear at important junctures in text. The paper also required the issue of cohesion in relation to the use of English idioms. It was described that there is often a complex cohesive relationship between the idioms and their co-texts, and speakers sometimes avail themselves of both the literal and idiomatic meanings of idioms for various textual or stylistic reasons.

In *An Analysis of Idiomatic Expression In Song Lyrics from of Monsters and Men's Album My Head Is An Animal*, Hernato (2017) from Sanata Dharma University of Yogyakarta aimed to find out the types and characteristics of idiomatic expressions found in the song lyrics form Of Monsters

and Men's Album My Head Is An Animal. The researcher analyzed the data with the theory of Bieber (2006) and Laglotz (2006). The results had shown that there are 31 idioms. They are divided into two types, verb + noun phrase idioms (4 idioms) and verb + particle idioms (27 idioms). The characteristics of idiomatic expressions were found non-compositional (27 idioms) and compositional (4 idioms).

### Research Methodology

The present research attempts to analyze idiomatic properties in *This Is Me Letting You Go* based on the theory of Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994). Idioms in the selected material are explored and their meanings are investigated and then classified the statuses fixed with them. The acronyms for six properties used in the present study are **C** for conventionality, **I<sup>1</sup>** for inflexibility, **F** for figuration, **P** for proverbiality, **I<sup>2</sup>** for informality and **A** for affect.

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

In order to collect the data, the idioms in the selected book are explored according to the meanings mentioned in the dictionary application of *English Idioms & Phrases* and *Oxford American Dictionary* for learners of English. Then, the idiomatic properties are classified, using the theory proposed by Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994). In classifying figuration, the definitions for twenty figures of speech mentioned by Nordquist (2018) are applied. The following table shows the sample data of the idiomatic properties in *This Is Me Letting You Go*.

**Table 1: Idiomatic properties in *This Is Me Letting You Go***

No.	Sentence	C	I <sup>1</sup>	F	P	I <sup>2</sup>	A
1.	And <b>in case</b> there's no one else to remind you, here is what else I want you to know:	√					
2.	At the end of the day, we're all <b>in charge of</b> what we bring to our lives.	√					
3.	I'm texting you this because I like you and I'm wondering if you've <b>caught on</b> .	√	√			√	
4.	The kind we pick up over coffee that ends up <b>dragging on</b> for hours and ...	√	√			√	
5.	I like a lot of things about you but I'm not going to text those to you because I'm <b>playing it cool</b> .	√	√				
6.	Everything is better since they <b>came along</b> .	√	√			√	
7.	Your happiness becomes your priority and <b>so long as</b> they are contributing to it, you can work around the test.	√					
8.	The right people don't stand <b>in the way of</b> the things you once wanted and make you choose them over them.	√					
9.	The truth is, when we <b>pass</b> someone <b>up</b> because the timing is wrong, what we are really saying is that ...	√				√	
10.	<b>After all</b> , you're a smart person.	√		√			
11.	I know you've <b>grown up</b> with inklings of suspicion_	√				√	
12.	Your thoughts whirl around at strange speeds and you cannot seem to <b>reel</b> yourself <b>in</b> .	√					
13.	I know that life has been a constant <b>tug-of-war</b> for you, no matter where you go.	√					√
14.	There are pre-designed answers to these questions, <b>of course</b> .	√					
15.	I <b>lose my mind</b> and my heart and my footing over love...	√	√	√		√	√

No.	Sentence	C	I <sup>1</sup>	F	P	I <sup>2</sup>	A
16.	But if the answer is no, then I encourage you to <b>move on</b> .	√				√	
17.	<b>At the end of the day</b> , love is wonderful but it isn't enough to make up for an entire lifetime of compromising your core values.	√					
18.	For a long time, fail to realize that you can feel anything <b>at all</b> .	√		√		√	
19.	Every <b>now and then</b> , remain transfixed on the memory of their skin against yours,...	√		√			
20.	I know you have been <b>chipped away</b> and worn down piece by piece_	√				√	
21.	We need to <b>take risks</b> but we're afraid to watch it all come crashing down around us.	√	√				√
22.	We don't want to play the villain but we don't want to <b>play the fool</b> either.	√	√	√			√
23.	... you can trust yourself to <b>walk away from</b> the situations that do not grow or aid you.	√					
24.	The need to <b>bend over backwards</b> , to accommodate others, to seek validation from those who do not deserve your heart, disappears.	√					√
25.	They are the failures that <b>kick us off</b> our own team.	√				√	
26.	It may never fill up the whole that failure <b>carved out</b> inside of you.	√				√	
27.	We cannot spend our time hoping that our big failures will <b>make sense</b> later on.	√	√			√	√
28.	We have to forgive ourselves for having the self-awareness to <b>change our minds</b> about the really big things.	√	√				√
29.	Every flaw you <b>picked apart</b> inside the mirror.	√				√	
30.	You'd be shocked at all the ways your useless major still <b>comes in handy</b> .	√	√			√	√

In analyzing the data, according to the theory, it has already been claimed that idioms are conventionalized and the property of conventionality obligatorily applies to all idioms. Therefore, all the idioms used in the selected book fits with the status of conventionality and other properties

are analyzed, classified, based on the theory of Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994). The frequencies and percentage of the properties are described in the following table.

**Table 2: Frequency and percentage of idiomatic properties in *This Is Me Letting You Go***

No.	Idiomatc Properties	Frequency	Percentage
1	Conventionality	56	46.67%
2	Inflexibility	13	10.83%
3	Figuration	8	6.67%
4	Proverbiality	0	0%
5	Informality	31	25.83%
6	Affect	12	10%
<b>Total</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Data Interpretation

Sample data interpretation of the idiomatic properties is descried as follows:

(1) *I'm texting you this because I like you and I'm wondering if you've **caught on**.*

In the above sentence, the contextual meaning of the idiom **caught on** is **to become popular and the standard**. It fits with conventionality because its meaning cannot be predicted based on the meaning of its individual constituent. Since **catch on** is an intransitive verb and cannot be used in passive voice, it has a limited syntactic frame and it fits with inflexibility. Moreover, it is involved in informal register and so informality applies on it.

(2) *I like a lot of things about you but I'm not going to text those to you because I'm **playing it cool**.*

The contextual meaning of **playing it cool** in the above sentence is **making an effort to be calm and unemotional**. As its meaning is not entirely predicted and its syntactic structure cannot be changed, it fits with conventionality and inflexibility.

(3) *I **lose my mind** and my heart and my footing over love...*

In the above sentence, the contextual meaning of **lose my mind** is **become crazy and insane**. It fits with conventionality, inflexibility, figuration, informality and affect. Its meaning cannot be predicted and its syntactic frame cannot be added like **my mind is lost**. In addition, it is found as a use of hyperbole in the sentence and it affects that the writer cannot control her mind.

(4) *Every **now and then**, remain transfixed on the memory of their skin against yours...*

In the above sentence, the contextual meaning of the idiom **now and then** is **sometimes and occasionally**. It fits with conventionality and figuration because its meaning cannot be predicted and it is found as a use of paradox in the selected book.

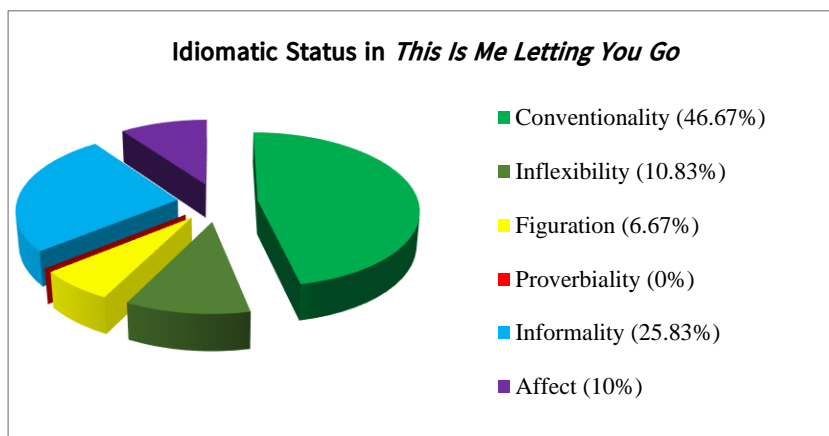
(5) *We need to **take risks** but we're afraid to watch it all come crashing down around us.*

The contextual meaning of **take risks** is **try to do something for which there is a high probability of a negative or unfortunate outcome**. Its meaning cannot be predicted and syntactic

frame can be substituted like *risks are taken*. Moreover, it can be assumed that the writer will do something dangerous for her life. Therefore, *take risks* fits with conventionality, inflexibility and affect.

### Findings and Discussion

The present research focuses on the analysis of the idiomatic properties in *This Is Me Letting You Go* by Heidi Priebe. Six properties of the idioms are analyzed and classified according to the theoretical framework of Nunberg, Sag and Wasow (1994).



**Figure 1: Idiomatic Status in *This Is Me Letting You Go***

The findings show that there are 56 idioms with the frequencies of 120 in the selected book. It is found that the frequency of conventionality is 56 (46.67%), inflexibility is 13 (10.83%), figuration is 8 (6.67%), proverbiality is 0 (0%), informality is 31 (25.83%) and affect is 12 (10%). As it is mentioned in the theory that the meanings of idioms cannot be predicted or at least, entirely predicted, it can be said that all the idioms in the selected book fitting with the property of conventionality. Apart from conventionality, informality is mostly found among the other properties in the selected book. It can be said that the writer has a wide knowledge of phrasal verbs to give the right message implicitly since most of the idioms in the selected book fitting with informality are phrasal verbs. Moreover, it can be assumed that there is no use of proverbiality as the selected material is a written discourse and a kind of self-help book presenting the facts and information.

### Conclusion

Self-help books became popular among the youths as a postmodern cultural one in the late twentieth century. The writers display their facts and information with the best choice of words and idioms so that the readers can get the right message and practically apply in solving their personal problems. The present research analyses the properties of idioms in *This is Me Letting You Go* by Heidi Priebe. The objectives are to classify the idiomatic properties in the selected book and to investigate the effects of idiomatic properties in the selected book. It is found that conventionality and informality are the most dominant properties in the selected book. It can also



be concluded that each property of idioms can highlight the message of the facts presented in the selected book to be more effective for the readers and not to be bored with reading the selected book. It can be said that the writer of the selected book can describe the detailed information of the content to meet with the readers' needs with the idioms fit with their respective properties. Moreover, the researcher would like to suggest that not only written but also spoken discourse can be applied to investigate idiomatic properties and finally, the present study can help the students get a better knowledge of the idioms in learning English literature.

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