

An Analysis of Idioms in Humorous Dialogues of Legally Blonde Movie (2001): A Semantic Study

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Abstract

This research examines idiomatic expressions found in the humorous dialogues of *Legally Blonde* (2001) using Leech's semantic theory. The study aims to identify the idioms used in the film, describe their meanings based on semantic interpretation, and explain how they contribute to humor. A descriptive qualitative method was applied, with the film script serving as the primary data source. The researcher carefully read the script, selected scenes containing humorous or informal conversations, and identified idioms spoken by the characters. Each idiom was then analyzed in context and categorized into four types: figurative, slang/colloquial, euphemistic, and hyperbolic. The findings reveal 17 idioms that support the film's comedic tone. Slang and colloquial idioms appear most frequently, reflecting the informal and youthful atmosphere of the film. Figurative idioms express emotion and personality, euphemistic soften direct statements, and hyperbolic idioms create exaggerated effects that strengthen humor. Overall, the study shows that idioms not only function as linguistic expressions but also play an important role in developing character identity and enhancing the humorous style of the film.

Keywords: *idiom, semantics, humor*

Introduction

In human life, language is important because it is the primary means by which people exchange ideas, feelings, and thoughts with one another. People can develop relationships, collaborate, and comprehend one another through communication. It would be difficult for people to communicate their thoughts or participate in social activities without language. Halliday & Matthiessen (2019) explain that language is a social semiotic system that constructs meaning, identity, and relationships, making it ideal for understanding why dialogue in films reflects social context. This means that language is not only used for communication but also reflects human creativity, culture, and social life.

One of the most popular languages in the world is English. It functions as an international language that connects people from different countries and cultures. People use English in many fields such as education, business, entertainment, and technology. Baker & Sangiamchit (2019) discuss English as a global lingua franca and how meaning varies across cultural interaction, ideal for idioms used in international media. This knowledge helps people communicate more effectively in different situations.

Several researchers have pointed out that English communication is not limited to straightforward, literal wording. In many situations, speakers choose figurative expressions because they help them express emotions, attitude, and social intention more effectively than plain language. social intentions Idioms are one of the most common linguistic features that enrich everyday communication and often appear in movies to

create humor, express attitude, or emphasize character identity. This trend makes idioms a relevant object to be examined in film dialogue.

Idioms are a fascinating element of language. In everyday speech, idioms are frequently employed to enhance the expressiveness, emotion, and humor of speech. Chen & Lai (2021), state that idioms are multiword expressions whose meanings require knowledge of culture and context. Since the meanings of idioms cannot simply be guessed from the words that form them, they often add richness and nuance to language, helping conversations sound more vivid and expressive. In many cases, idioms also mirror cultural values and social situations, so speakers may use them not only to convey a message, but also to express closeness, sarcasm, politeness, or even humor, depending on the context.

Figurative idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be understood literally. The intended meaning differs from the literal interpretation of the individual words. These idioms often use metaphorical language to convey emotions, situations, or concepts more vividly and colorfully. According to Orfan (2020), figurative idioms require cultural and contextual knowledge to be properly understood, as their meanings are not derived from the literal definitions of their component words. Gibbs (2017) argues that figurative language (including idioms) is grounded in cognitive embodiment and everyday conceptualization.

Slang and colloquial idioms are informal expressions used in everyday casual conversation that reflect natural speech patterns. These idioms are characterized by their informality and are typically associated with specific social groups, regions, or time periods. Tagliamonte (2018) explains that slang reflects identity, youth culture, and informal communication.

Euphemistic idioms are expressions used to replace direct or potentially offensive language with more polite, mild, or indirect alternatives. These idioms serve to soften the impact of uncomfortable, taboo, or sensitive topics. Jamet & Jobert (2019) describe euphemism idioms as a politeness and face-saving strategy in contemporary English.

Hyperbolic idioms are expressions that use extreme exaggeration for emphasis, effect, or humor. These idioms intentionally overstate reality to create a strong impression or convey intense emotions. Burgers, Brugman & Steen (2017) defines hyperbolic idioms as intensifies emotional and humorous expression in discourse. Beizaee & Suzani (2016) also explain that speakers often use exaggeration as a strategy to make expressions sound more dramatic or emotionally strong, which contributes to the overall impact of the message.

Several scholars have looked at idioms in movies, but each from a slightly different angle. For instance, Cahyaningtyas (2018) noticed that the idioms spoken by characters help the audience understand who they really are beneath the surface. Komalasari (2025) showed that film genres tend to shape how figurative language is used, meaning that not all films rely on idioms for the same effect. In another case, Nurhayati (2024) examined that figurative expressions make the storyline feel richer and more meaningful. Rohani (2018) also pointed out that viewers cannot appreciate non-literal expressions without paying attention to the context in which they appear. However, the existing literature has not given much attention to how idiomatic expressions actually trigger humor in romantic comedies, even though this genre relies strongly on comedic moments to entertain its audience.

This study looks at how idiomatic terms appear in *Legally Blonde's* (2001) hilarious dialogue. A semantic perspective is used in the analysis. According to Leech's (1981), semantics is the study of how meaning functions in language and how linguistic forms relate to the concepts they convey. The aims of this research are: (1) to identify idiomatic expressions in the film script, (2) to describe their meanings based on semantic theory, and (3) to explain how idioms contribute to humor in the dialogues.

Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the data. The qualitative method was selected because it provides the flexibility needed to interpret language meaningfully within its original context. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research offers a way to explore and understand how meaning is formed and interpreted, which makes it suitable for analyzing idiomatic expressions and their humorous functions in film dialogue.

The data for this study came from the script of *Legally Blonde* (2001). The script was used because it contains all the dialogue from the movie, so it provides a clear record of how the characters speak throughout the film. Using the script also made it easier to go back and check the scenes where idioms appear without having to replay the movie repeatedly. The film itself has many light and humorous moments, and these scenes often include idiomatic expressions. For this reason, the script offers plenty of material to examine how these idioms are used and how they support the humor in the dialogue.

The data were collected by reading the entire *Legally Blonde* script from start to finish. While going through the script, the parts that showed humorous or casual conversations were marked. After that, these scenes were checked again to identify expressions that could be considered idioms. Each idiom found in these scenes was written down together with the line, the character who said it, and the situation in which it was used. This step-by-step reading made it easier to make sure that none of the idioms were missed and that each one was taken from its actual context in the film.

In this study, the idioms were examined using Leech's (1981) semantic approach. Each idiom was looked at directly in the scene where it appeared to understand the meaning intended by the characters, rather than the literal word. After this step, the idioms were sorted into several types of meaning, for example figurative, associative, or connotative meanings. After the idioms were grouped, each one was looked at again to understand how it added to the humor in the scene. In this step, the idioms were checked again by looking at the scene itself, what was going on, who was speaking, and how the line came across. After that, all of the findings were reviewed together to see if any similarities appeared. From there, it became clearer which meanings were used more often and how the idioms played a part in creating the humor in the film.

Results and Discussion

This part shows the results of the study through the 17 idioms that appear in the funny parts of *Legally Blonde* (2001). After collecting them, the idioms were put into several groups depending on the kind of meaning they carry. Each one was then looked at in a scene to see how it actually works in the conversation. The main point here is to understand what the idioms mean in the film and how they help show the character's feelings, the way they talk to each other, and the humor that appears in the dialogue.

A total of 17 idiomatic expressions were found in the scenes of the film. These idioms appeared in a variety of contexts, including casual conversations, arguments, gossip, and moments of exaggeration. The idioms were then grouped into four categories: figurative idioms, slang/colloquial idioms, euphemistic idioms, and hyperbolic idioms.

Results

Table 1. Types of Idioms in *Legally Blonde* (2001)

Idiom Types	Frequency	Percentage
Figurative Idioms	6	35%
Slang / Colloquial Idioms	7	41%
Euphemistic Idioms	2	12%
Hyperbolic Idioms	2	12%
TOTAL:	17	100%

The findings show that idioms in *Legally Blonde* (2001) perform more than just linguistic functions; they shape the humor, social dynamics, and emotional tone of the film. Among the 17 idioms identified, slang and colloquial idioms were the most frequently used, which aligns with the film's informal, youthful, and energetic setting. This reflects Tagliamonte's (2018) observation that comedic films rely heavily on casual expressions to strengthen relatability and comedic timing.

In *Legally Blonde*, figurative idioms often highlight Elle's dramatic yet charming personality, reinforcing her role as a humorous protagonist. Euphemistic and hyperbolic idioms, though less frequent, still support the lighthearted tone of the film. Their strategic placement prevents dialogues from sounding too serious or impolite. As noted by Burgers et al. (2017), euphemisms and hyperboles help convey meaning indirectly and creatively, which is especially effective in humorous genres. This aligns with how *Legally Blonde* uses both types to soften confrontations and amplify comedic exaggeration.

Discussion

Figurative Idioms

Figurative idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be understood literally. These idioms often appear when characters express emotions like shock, frustration, or sarcasm.

- **Datum 1:** *I'm able to recall hundreds of important details at the **drop of a hat**.*
This idiom does not refer to a real hat. It is used to show that Elle can do something very quickly. Her exaggerated way of saying it adds a playful and confident tone to the scene.
- **Datum 2:** *Because I'm not Vanderbilt, suddenly I'm **white trash**?*
Elle is pointing out how ridiculous it is that people judge her based on her background. She says it sarcastically, which makes the line funny and sharp.
- **Datum 3:** *You're breaking up with me because **I'm too blonde**?*
"Too blonde" is not about her hair. It is a way of saying she's being judged as silly or not serious. The way she delivers it makes the moment ironic and a bit humorous.
- **Datum 4:** *Did you get the **rock** yet?*
"rock" refers to an engagement ring. It is a casual, figurative way to talk about something valuable, and it fits the friendly, gossiping vibe of the conversation.
- **Datum 5:** *I'm planning this **great mixer**.*
A "great mixer" is basically just a party. When Elle says it, you can tell she's excited and happy, totally her bubbly self.
- **Datum 6:** *I need a boyfriend who's not such a complete **bonehead**.*

When Elle calls someone a “bonehead,” she’s basically just saying they’re being kind of dumb, but in a funny way. She’s annoyed, but it’s more like she’s teasing than actually mad.

According to Leech (1981), indirect speech acts are often more polite than direct ones. Figurative idioms exemplify this principle by wrapping potentially face-threatening acts in metaphorical language. The data reveals that figurative idioms frequently appear in contexts where characters need to express disagreement, offer criticism, or navigate socially delicate situations while maintaining positive social relationships.

Slang / Colloquial Idioms

Slang and colloquial idioms are informal, conversational expressions used in everyday speech that reflect how people naturally talk in casual settings. These idioms help create authentic dialogue and establish a character's voice, background, and social context.

- **Datum 1:** *Dicking around.*
This idiom appears in the restaurant scene and means wasting time or not being serious. The phrase expresses irritation, but its informal tone makes the dialogue humorous rather than confrontational.
- **Datum 2:** *White trash.*
Elle uses this expression on the street when responding sarcastically to social judgment. Although the term is rude, Elle’s exaggerated reaction turns the phrase into a humorous commentary on unfair stereotypes.
- **Datum 3:** *At the drop of a hat.*
While sometimes viewed as figurative, in the film it functions as a common colloquial idiom meaning “immediately” or “without hesitation.” Elle uses it confidently to show her abilities, and her enthusiastic tone adds comedic exaggeration.
- **Datum 4:** *No biggie.*
This idiom appears in a friendly conversation to mean “no problem.” It reflects the character’s relaxed attitude and keeps the scene informal and cheerful.
- **Datum 5:** *Spill.*
Used in gossip scenes, means “tell me what happened.” It highlights the playful and close relationship between characters, especially during moments of excitement.
- **Datum 6:** *I blew it.*
This idiom means failing or losing a chance. Even in more serious scenes, its informal nature keeps the dialogue relatable and humorous.
- **Datum 7:** *Piece of ass.*
Although vulgar, the phrase reflects how certain characters objectify others. Its exaggerated tone contributes to the movie’s bold humor and commentary on social attitudes.

Leech (1981) emphasizes that politeness strategies vary depending on social relationships and power dynamics. Slang idioms, being the most frequent type in the film (41%), reflect the collegiate and social setting of *Legally Blonde*, where characters prioritize camaraderie and informal rapport over formality.

Euphemistic Idioms

Euphemistic idioms are expressions used to soften, obscure, or politely disguise meanings that may sound too direct, harsh, or inappropriate if stated literally.

- **Datum 1:** *I’m taking the dog.*
This line, spoken by Paulette, directly confronting her ex-husband with aggressive language, she uses the idiom to politely state that she is reclaiming ownership and

control. The humorous tone comes from the unexpected confidence that contrasts with her earlier timid behavior.

- **Datum 2:** *We need to have a little talk.*

Though it sounds harmless, this idiom is commonly used to signal a serious or uncomfortable conversation. In the film, it is delivered in a light and slightly sarcastic manner, making the tension feel humorous rather than confrontational.

These euphemistic idioms show that characters often choose softer expressions to keep conversations light. Even during tense moments, the use of euphemisms maintains the film's comedic tone and prevents the dialogue from sounding too blunt or hostile.

Hyperbolic Idioms

Hyperbolic idioms include exaggerated expressions used to emphasize emotions, reactions, or situations. They do not describe literal truth but instead intensify the meaning for dramatic or humorous effect.

- **Datum 1:** *This is the end of the world!*

Elle uses this phrase to dramatize a disappointing situation. Obviously, her world is not literally ending, but the exaggeration highlights her emotional intensity. The humorous effect comes from how overly dramatic she appears.

- **Datum 2:** *You look like a walking disaster.*

This idiom exaggerates someone's messy appearance. Rather than describing them literally as a "disaster," the speaker uses hyperbole to inject humor into the criticism. The exaggerated phrasing makes the interaction funny instead of rude.

The relatively low frequency of hyperbolic idioms (11%) suggests their specialized function in the film's dialogue; they appear primarily in emotionally charged or comedic moments where exaggeration serves to entertain, express solidarity, or heighten dramatic impact.

After looking at the four types of idioms, each one works in a different way, but they still help create the humor in *Legally Blonde* (2001). Figurative idioms mostly help show what the characters are feeling, and sometimes they make the moment look a bit dramatic or even sarcastic, which ends up making the scene funnier. Slang and colloquial idioms also appear pretty often because the characters talk the way young people normally talk, so the conversations come out more natural and not too formal. There are only a few euphemistic idioms, but they help make harsh lines sound softer. Hyperbolic idioms add exaggeration that makes simple situations feel over the top, which adds to the comedy. When all of these are put together, the dialogue sounds a lot more alive and fits the movie's fun, light, and playful style really well.

Conclusion

This research set out to identify idiomatic expressions in *Legally Blonde* (2001), describe their meanings using Leech's semantic theory, and explain their contribution to humor in the film. The analysis found 17 idioms that function across four categories, such as figurative, slang/colloquial, euphemistic, and hyperbolic. Each type supports the film's comedic tone in different ways. The study reveals that slang and colloquial idioms are the most dominant, highlighting how informal language shapes the youthful and lively interactions among characters. Figurative, euphemistic, and hyperbolic idioms further enrich the dialogue by adding irony, softness, and exaggeration, all of which enhance the humor and character expression.

Future research is encouraged to expand this study by examining idiomatic expressions in films from different genres to compare their functions across various narrative and emotional contexts.

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