INTERACTION: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Vol. 13, No. 3; September 2026
P-ISSN: 2406-9558; E-ISSN: 2406-9566

The Use of Imagery as a Representation of Love in the Song "White Ferrari" by Frank Ocean

Khansa Shiba Nabila Santoso
ssashiba02@gmail.com

Arso Setyaji
arsosetyaji@upgris.ac.id

Ajeng Setyorini
ajengsetyorini@upgris.ac.id

Universitas PGRI Semarang

ABSTRACT

This study examines the types and frequency of imagery and their role in representing love in Frank Ocean's "White Ferrari." A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using the lyrics of this single song as the corpus. The analysis focused on 16 selected lyric segments containing words, phrases, or clauses interpreted as imagery. These segments were classified using Perrine's imagery categories and examined through an adapted interpretive typology distinguishing physical, emotional, and reflective and enduring love. Data analysis involved reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, supported by descriptive frequency counts. The reported coding identified seven instances of organic imagery, six of visual imagery, two of tactile imagery, and one of auditory imagery, with no instances classified as olfactory, gustatory, or kinesthetic imagery. Organic imagery was therefore the most frequent category, followed by visual imagery. The interpretation suggests that the selected segments connect love with physical closeness, emotional attachment, withheld communication, memory, and continuing affection after separation. These connections are presented as possible readings rather than a definitive sequence of relationship development. The study illustrates how imagery classification and contextual interpretation can be combined to examine the representation of love in contemporary song lyrics. The findings suggest possible applications in teaching imagery and literary interpretation, although no classroom intervention was conducted and educational effectiveness remains untested.

Keywords: Imagery; Representation of Love; Song Lyric; Frank Ocean; Poetry Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Song lyrics offer a useful object of literary study because they communicate experiences through concentrated language, repetition, figurative expression, and imagery. Although lyrics are performed alongside music, their verbal features can also be examined through close reading. Such analysis helps explain how particular

words and images contribute to the representation of abstract experiences, including affection, longing, separation, and memory. In this context, imagery provides a connection between sensory language and the meanings readers construct from a text.

Imagery requires careful distinction from general statements of emotion. A lyric may express sadness or affection directly without necessarily evoking a sensory experience. Perrine's (1997) classification distinguishes seven imagery categories: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic, and organic. These categories provide a basis for identifying language associated with sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, movement, and internal bodily sensations. However, identifying a category does not fully explain its literary function. An image may acquire different meanings depending on its surrounding lines, its relationship with other images, and the perspective of the lyrical speaker. Imagery analysis therefore requires both attention to sensory wording and contextual interpretation.

Previous research provides a foundation for examining imagery and emotional representation in song lyrics. Tambunsaribu and Sigalingging (2024), for example, investigated figurative language and imagery in two songs by Bruno Mars and discussed how these features communicate feelings indirectly. Their work illustrates the relevance of sensory and figurative expression to interpreting emotional meaning in popular music. From a different analytical perspective, Liztiawati and Nurhayati (2021) examined the representation of love in English children's and adult song lyrics through transitivity analysis. Their study demonstrates that love can be investigated through the linguistic choices that construct experiences and relationships within lyrics. Together, these approaches support an analysis that connects identifiable textual features with the interpretation of love.

The present study addresses the relationship between imagery classification and contextual meaning in Frank Ocean's "White Ferrari," a song from the album Blonde (2016). Its references to a shared journey, bodily proximity, communication, and recollection provide material for examining how love is represented through sensory language and surrounding emotional statements. These features also raise interpretive questions. A reference to travel does not automatically constitute kinesthetic imagery, and an expression of commitment does not necessarily qualify as organic imagery. Similarly, a visible object may support a symbolic reading, but that reading must be distinguished from what the wording directly evokes. The song therefore offers an opportunity to examine both the possibilities and the limits of connecting sensory classification with emotional interpretation.

The contribution of this study lies in explaining how selected imagery functions within the representation of love in one song. Frequency counts describe the distribution of the assigned imagery categories, while close reading considers the meanings associated with individual segments. These forms of analysis serve

different purposes: the most frequent category is not necessarily the most significant for interpretation, and an infrequent image may still contribute substantially to the portrayal of intimacy or separation. The study consequently examines imagery as part of the song's context rather than treating category identification as a complete explanation of meaning.

For the interpretation of love, the study uses an adapted analytical typology comprising physical love, emotional love, and reflective and enduring love. Physical love concerns bodily proximity and shared physical experience. Emotional love concerns affection, familiarity, vulnerability, and difficulties in communicating attachment. Reflective and enduring love concerns attachment expressed through recollection, imagined possibilities, and continuing care beyond immediate togetherness. These categories function as interpretive lenses developed for the present analysis. They are not treated as mutually exclusive, and their use does not assume that the song depicts a fixed progression from one form of love to another.

The analysis also has possible relevance to poetry teaching. Selected lyric segments could be used to help students distinguish sensory imagery from direct emotional statements, justify classifications through textual evidence, and compare alternative interpretations. However, these activities are proposed applications of the literary findings. Because the study does not include classroom observation or a teaching intervention, it cannot establish improvements in students' motivation, comprehension, or interpretive ability.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What types of imagery are identified in the lyrics of "White Ferrari"? (2) Which imagery category occurs most frequently in the selected coded segments? and (3) How do these segments contribute to possible representations of love in the song? The study aims to identify imagery categories, describe their distribution, and interpret their relationship with physical, emotional, and reflective and enduring love. Its conclusions are limited to the selected song and the analytical decisions made within this textual study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Imagery in Literary Texts

Imagery refers to language that evokes sensory experiences and enables readers to imagine what a text describes. In literary analysis, imagery connects verbal expression with experiences of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, moving, and sensing internal bodily conditions. Its significance lies not only in creating concrete descriptions but also in supporting atmosphere, characterization, and thematic meaning. However, sensory imagery must be distinguished from direct emotional statements. A sentence expressing affection or regret may communicate an important feeling without necessarily producing a sensory image.

The imagery classification attributed to Perrine (1997) in this study comprises seven categories: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic, and organic imagery. Visual imagery evokes sight, while auditory imagery evokes sound. Tactile imagery concerns touch, texture, and temperature; olfactory and gustatory imagery concern smell and taste. Kinesthetic imagery evokes bodily movement or muscular experience, whereas organic imagery concerns internal bodily sensations, such as hunger, thirst, fatigue, or pain. These distinctions require attention to the language of each segment. An emotional statement should not automatically be classified as organic imagery, just as mentioning a journey does not necessarily establish kinesthetic imagery.

Classification provides a descriptive foundation for analysis, but it does not determine an image's meaning. The same sensory detail may suggest intimacy, discomfort, distance, or recollection depending on its context. Frequency counts can indicate which categories occur most often within a coded corpus, while close reading explains how particular images contribute to interpretation. Consequently, numerical dominance and literary significance should be considered separately.

Song Lyrics as Objects of Literary Analysis

Song lyrics can be examined as literary texts through their imagery, figurative language, repetition, perspective, and thematic organization. A textual approach focuses on how verbal choices construct meaning, while recognizing that musical performance may introduce additional effects beyond the scope of lyric analysis. It also distinguishes the lyrical speaker from the songwriter: experiences represented in a song should not automatically be treated as verified autobiographical events. Tambunsaribu and Sigalingging (2024) examined figurative language and imagery in Bruno Mars's "Talking to the Moon" and "It Will Rain." Their study discussed how these devices convey feelings indirectly, supporting the relevance of imagery to the interpretation of emotional expression in song lyrics. For the present study, this relationship provides a basis for considering how sensory descriptions contribute to meanings associated with love. Nevertheless, such meanings require contextual justification rather than an assumption that every figurative expression constitutes imagery.

The Representation of Love in Song Lyrics

Love can be represented through declarations of affection, descriptions of closeness, interaction between speakers, recollection, and responses to separation. Its representation therefore extends beyond the occurrence of words explicitly naming love. Analysis must consider how language constructs relationships and how individual expressions contribute to the broader emotional context. Liztiawati and Nurhayati (2021) investigated the representation of love in English children's and adult song lyrics using transitivity analysis. Their approach examines love through the linguistic construction of experience rather than through sensory

classification. In comparison, the present study focuses on the relationship between imagery and interpretations of love. These approaches address related concerns but examine different textual features.

To organize interpretation, the present study adopts three analytical categories: physical love, emotional love, and reflective and enduring love. Physical love concerns bodily proximity and shared physical experience. Emotional love concerns affection, familiarity, vulnerability, and communication within a relationship. Reflective and enduring love concerns attachment expressed through memory, imagined possibilities, and continuing care. These categories form the study's adapted interpretive typology rather than an independently verified classification attributed to Ward. They may overlap, and their application does not establish a necessary chronological progression.

Song Lyrics and Poetry Teaching

Research has also considered the relationship between lyric analysis and poetry instruction. Khuzaimatus Sa'adah et al. (2023) examined themes in Keshi's Bandaids mini album and discussed their contribution to poetry teaching through an intrinsic literary approach. Their work provides an example of connecting the analysis of contemporary songs with proposed educational applications. Building on this connection, imagery analysis could support activities in which students identify sensory wording, explain classification decisions, and compare interpretations using textual evidence. Ambiguous segments could encourage discussion of the distinction between literal description and inferred symbolism. These are proposed instructional uses, however, and textual analysis alone cannot demonstrate improvements in motivation, comprehension, or interpretive ability.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design using library research to examine imagery and its representation of love in Frank Ocean's "White Ferrari," released on the album Blonde in 2016. The analysis focused on the written lyrics rather than the song's musical arrangement or performance. This design allowed the researcher to describe selected textual features and interpret their meanings within the context of the song. The corpus consisted of the lyrics of one song. The analytical sample comprised 16 selected lyric segments presented in the manuscript's coding inventory. A segment contained words, phrases, clauses, or lines interpreted as imagery. These segments were examined to identify imagery categories and explore their relationship with representations of love. Because the study involved textual analysis, it included no human participants or classroom intervention. Its findings were limited to the selected song and did not establish patterns across Frank Ocean's other works or contemporary music more broadly.

Instrument and Procedures

The researcher served as the primary instrument for identifying, classifying, and interpreting the textual data. An analytical table supported this process by organizing the selected lyric excerpts, imagery categories, sensory meanings, representations of love, and interpretive explanations. Secondary materials included books, journal articles, and previous studies concerning imagery, love in literary texts, and poetry teaching. The imagery framework comprised seven categories attributed to Perrine (1997): visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic, and organic imagery. Interpretation of love used the study's adapted typology of physical love, emotional love, and reflective and enduring love. Physical love concerned bodily proximity and shared physical experience; emotional love concerned affection, familiarity, vulnerability, and communication; and reflective and enduring love concerned memory, imagined possibilities, and continuing attachment. These categories guided interpretation rather than functioning as mutually exclusive classifications.

Data collection involved documentation and repeated reading of the lyrics. The researcher selected segments interpreted as containing imagery, assigned imagery categories, and recorded the classifications in the analytical table. Each selected segment was then considered in relation to its surrounding lyrical context to explain its possible connection with love. Relevant literature was consulted to support the discussion and develop proposed implications for poetry teaching. These implications were derived from the textual analysis and were not tested through classroom activities.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, the researcher selected textual material relevant to the research questions and organized it into imagery categories. This stage focused the analysis on the relationship between the selected wording, its assigned sensory category, and its possible thematic meaning. During data display, the selected segments were arranged in tables and accompanied by interpretive explanations. Descriptive frequencies summarized the distribution of the assigned imagery categories. These counts complemented the qualitative analysis by indicating which category occurred most frequently within the selected segments. They did not measure the emotional intensity or interpretive importance of individual images.

Conclusion drawing involved synthesizing the classifications and contextual interpretations to answer the three research questions: the types of imagery identified, the most frequently assigned category, and the ways the selected segments contributed to representations of love. The manuscript describes verification through comparison with the analytical frameworks and relevant

literature. Interpretive claims were treated as possible readings of the text rather than definitive statements about the songwriter's personal experiences. The analysis also distinguished proposed educational applications from demonstrated learning outcomes.

RESULT AND DISUSSION

The analysis addresses the imagery categories identified in "White Ferrari," their reported frequency, and their possible contribution to the representation of love. The existing inventory contains 16 selected lyric segments coded as visual (V1–V6), organic (O1–O7), tactile (T1–T2), or auditory (A1). These identifiers refer to the manuscript's selected segments rather than line numbers in the complete song. The discussion distinguishes the recorded classifications from contextual interpretations and identifies cases in which the sensory basis of a code remains uncertain.

Distribution of the Reported Imagery Categories

Table 1
Distribution of Imagery Codes in the Selected Lyric Segments

Imagery Category	**Number of Segments**
Visual	6
Organic	7
Tactile	2
Auditory	1
Olfactory	0
Gustatory	0
Kinesthetic	0
Total	**16**

The frequencies describe the original assignments and do not constitute independently verified recoding. Table 1 shows that organic imagery has the highest reported frequency, with seven segments, followed by visual imagery with six. Tactile and auditory imagery account for two and one segments, respectively. No selected segment was assigned to olfactory, gustatory, or kinesthetic imagery. These zero counts describe the selected inventory; they do not establish the absence of every possible sensory reading across the complete lyrics. The distribution requires qualification because several assignments depend on inferred experience rather than explicit sensory wording. Accordingly, the recorded predominance of organic imagery should be understood as a feature of the existing coding, not as conclusive evidence that internal bodily sensations dominate the song. Category frequencies also do not establish interpretive importance. A less frequent image may contribute substantially to a particular reading of intimacy, fatigue, or communication.

Visual Imagery and the Representation of Memory

The six segments classified as visual imagery connect observable details with imagined situations. In V1, "dilated eyes" and "clouds" (Ocean, 2016, segment V1) provide identifiable visual cues. Attention to another person's appearance may suggest intimacy, but this interpretation follows from the relational context rather than from the sensory category alone. V2 names the car associated with the song's title and links it with a positive recollection. The car can therefore be read as a reference point for shared memory. Interpreting it as a symbol of luxury, freedom, or youth requires additional justification and is not established simply by naming the object.

V3 presents an unusual combination of bodily appearance and cosmetic alteration. It may suggest a changed or unfamiliar appearance, although a broader claim about identity remains interpretive. V5 evokes enclosing walls, giving a concrete spatial form to a possible sense of restriction. V6 refers to a skull, which provides a visible bodily object and may invite reflection on mortality. However, the inference that this image represents the death of the relationship is only one possible contextual reading. V4 concerns a proposed vacation and possible destinations. Although it invites the imagination of a shared future, the wording recorded in the manuscript does not describe a specific visible scene. Its classification as visual imagery is therefore less secure than cases with explicit references to observable objects. This distinction shows why an imagined possibility should not automatically be treated as a visual image.

Organic Imagery and Direct Emotional Expression

The seven segments coded as organic imagery concern discomfort, enjoyment, uncertainty, withheld expression, familiarity, separation, and continuing affection. These meanings are relevant to the representation of love, but relevance to emotion does not by itself establish organic imagery. Under a sensory definition, organic imagery requires language evoking internal bodily experience. Several of the selected segments instead state feelings, evaluate an experience, or describe a relationship. For example, O7 contains "I care for you still" (Ocean, 2016, segment O7). This wording directly expresses continuing affection without identifying an internal bodily sensation. O2 recalls a positive experience, while O5 expresses familiarity between the speaker and the addressee. These segments provide evidence for emotional attachment, but their classification as organic imagery needs stronger sensory justification. O1 conveys unease about speaking during the journeys, and O3 expresses uncertainty associated with an earlier age; neither should be assigned an internal bodily sensation that the recorded wording does not supply.

O4 and O6 associate emotional difficulty with withheld or unsuccessful communication. Their contribution lies in the relationship between what the speaker feels and what is expressed. These segments support an interpretation of emotional

suppression and distance, although they do not explicitly describe internal bodily sensations. Distinguishing thematic emotion from sensory imagery strengthens the interpretation while acknowledging the limits of the original coding.

Tactile and Auditory Classifications

T1 expresses a desire for closeness. It can be interpreted as bodily proximity, but it may also request loyalty or companionship. Proximity alone does not establish a sensation of touch, so the tactile assignment remains open to reconsideration. T2 contains "body's achin'" (Ocean, 2016, segment T2), which explicitly conveys bodily discomfort. This wording supports a reading of physical fatigue, although internal ache may fit organic imagery more closely than tactile imagery, depending on the operational coding rule. Its association with emotional exhaustion is a further interpretation rather than a direct statement about the relationship. A1 refers to communication mediated through a text to speech function. The reference makes technologically produced voice a possible association, but the recorded segment does not describe an audible quality or a specific sound. Its auditory classification should therefore remain qualified. The segment may nevertheless contribute to an interpretation of indirect communication when considered alongside the references to speaking and silence elsewhere in the inventory. This thematic connection should not be presented as proof of auditory imagery.

Imagery and Possible Representations of Love

The study's adapted typology provides three perspectives on the selected segments: physical love, emotional love, and reflective and enduring love. These are interpretive categories used in the present analysis. Their application does not demonstrate that every segment belongs exclusively to one category, nor does grouping the examples establish a chronological progression through the relationship. Physical love can be considered through attention to appearance, proximity, and bodily condition in V1, T1, and T2. The speaker's attention to the addressee's eyes may suggest close observation, while the request for nearness may express a desire to remain together. The reference to bodily ache introduces discomfort. Read together, these segments permit discussion of closeness and vulnerability, but they do not conclusively establish a movement from intimacy to the end of the relationship.

Emotional love is expressed through familiarity, remembered enjoyment, continuing care, and difficulties in communication. O2, O5, and O7 support interpretations of affection and attachment, while O1, O4, and O6 complicate these meanings through hesitation and silence. A1 may extend the communication theme by referring to technological mediation. The contribution of these segments is their presentation of attachment as compatible with imperfect expression. This interpretation remains relevant even where an original imagery assignment is uncertain. Reflective and enduring love can be explored through recollection and imagined possibilities. V2 connects an object with remembered experience, while

V4 introduces a possible shared future. V5 may suggest restriction, and V3 and V6 introduce images that resist a single interpretation. Together, these segments allow love to be considered in relation to memory, uncertainty, and bodily vulnerability. They do not establish a definitive symbolic meaning or an inevitable sequence from physical attachment to reflective acceptance.

The findings show that imagery in "White Ferrari" is not decorative but structurally tied to the song's emotional arc. Organic (7) and visual (6) imagery dominate, while tactile (2) and auditory (1) are sparse and kinesthetic, gustatory, and olfactory imagery are absent. This pattern follows from the song's setting: a single car journey offers little material for taste or smell, but ample material for what is seen and internally felt. Notably, kinesthetic imagery is absent despite the journey being literally about motion movement is conveyed through visual and organic language instead, reinforcing that outward scenery and inward feeling are treated as inseparable throughout the lyric.

Mapped onto Ward's (2009) framework, the imagery clusters trace a progression rather than a static inventory: physical love (T1, V1, T2) moves from closeness to fatigue; emotional love (O1–O7, A1) between warmth and withheld communication; reflective love (V2–V6) extends into memory, imagined futures, and mortality. This sequencing suggests the relationship is first felt bodily, then processed emotionally, and finally reckoned with in memory. It also explains why the tactile and auditory images, though numerically scarce, carry outsized weight T1/T2 bookend the song's physical intimacy, and A1 alone captures its central theme of communication breakdown. Frequency counts alone understate this significance, supporting the value of pairing classification with close reading. The more surreal images (V3, V6) resist single-meaning readings and mark a shift from literal to figurative seeing as the song approaches its emotional low point form tracking content. Rather than a limitation, this ambiguity is a resource: it is exactly the kind of material that supports argued, evidence-based interpretation in poetry instruction.

These results align with prior work showing that song lyrics can sustain serious literary analysis and support poetry teaching (Haliza, 2025; Janah & Mulyono, 2025; Khuzaimatus Sa'adah et al., 2023; Sholihah et al., 2024). This study extends that work by combining two frameworks Perrine for imagery type, Ward for the representation of love to produce a layered reading rather than a flat inventory, suggesting lyric analysis can model the fuller interpretive process expected in literary study. The reported motivational benefits of song-based instruction may stem from this same richness: familiar songs reward close attention much like canonical poetry does.

Using the imagery classification in Table 1, students can underline and colour-code sensory language, sorting it into Perrine's categories to build basic recognition skills. Practically, students can classify sensory language into Perrine's categories using Table 1, then link specific images to types of love physical closeness (T1,

V1), emotional connection (O5, O7), or reflective, memory-based love (V2, V5, V6). Ambiguous images such as V3 and V6 can train close reading by inviting competing interpretations, while the shared car journey can model writing a short poem that uses one sensory domain to represent an abstract feeling. These suggestions are pedagogical implications drawn from the literary analysis, not results of a classroom trial. Future research should implement the activities and measure their effect on students' comprehension and motivation. Overall, the discussion indicates that "White Ferrari" holds clear potential as instructional material for teaching imagery and the representation of love, though this potential still needs empirical verification.

A possible classroom sequence would begin with students identifying the sensory wording in selected lyric segments. They could then assign imagery categories, explain uncertain cases, and compare possible representations of love using the surrounding context. Assessment could consider the accuracy of sensory identification, the strength of textual justification, and recognition of alternative readings. These activities are proposed applications; the study does not demonstrate improvements in motivation, comprehension, or interpretive ability. The analysis is limited to one song and a selected inventory of 16 segments. Several classifications remain open to reconsideration, and the available manuscript does not document an independent coding check or a complete audit of repeated and overlapping instances. The reported frequencies consequently describe the existing coding rather than a verified final distribution. The findings are most useful as a contextual interpretation of the selected material, with explicit separation between sensory evidence, direct emotional statements, and inferred symbolism. Further analysis should apply consistent sensory criteria to the complete corpus before making stronger claims about category dominance

CONCLUSION

This study examined the types of imagery in "White Ferrari," their dominant patterns, and how imagery is actualized as a representation of love. The analysis found that organic and visual imagery dominate the lyric, reflecting the song's car-journey setting and its close pairing of outward scenery with inward feeling. Mapped onto Ward's framework, these images trace a progression from physical closeness, through emotional connection marked by silence and withheld communication, to reflective and enduring love expressed through memory and mortality. Even sparsely represented categories tactile and auditory imagery carry interpretive weight disproportionate to their frequency, underscoring that imagery analysis benefits from close reading alongside classification. These findings support the view that popular song lyrics, despite their brevity and familiarity, contain imagery dense and layered enough to sustain serious literary analysis. They further suggest that "White Ferrari" holds concrete potential as instructional material for poetry teaching, offering students an accessible route into imagery identification and interpretation, including practice with ambiguous, multiply-interpretable images. As this potential has not yet been tested in an actual

classroom, future research should implement the proposed activities and assess their effect on students' comprehension, interpretive skill, and motivation in learning English through poetry.

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