

# IMAGERY AND CONNOTATIVE MEANING FOUND IN SONG LYRICS OF TAYLOR SWIFT'S FOLKLORE

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## ABSTRACT

*This research focuses on analyzing imagery and connotative meaning found in song lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The aims of this research are to find out the types of imagery used in song lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore also to find out the types of connotative meaning from the imagery found in song lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. This research analyzed the seven types of imagery utilizing Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson's (2017) theory and will go in-depth analyzing its meaning by using the three types of connotative meaning proposed by Riebs & Reeves's (2005). The research method used in this research is a qualitative method. From this research, out of 138 data the researchers found all 7 types of imagery used in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. Those seven types of imagery are visual imagery (50 data), auditory imagery (11 data), olfactory imagery (1 datum), gustatory imagery (1 datum), tactile imagery (7 data), organic imagery (25 data), and kinesthetic imagery (43 data). The researchers also found there are 3 types of connotative meaning used in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. Those three types of connotative meaning namely positive (47 data), negative (66 data), dan neutral (25 data).*

**Keywords:** Imagery, connotative, meaning, lyrics

## INTRODUCTION

Language plays a critical role in literature as it is the medium through which an author conveys their message to the reader. Moreover, language aids in setting the mood and creating an atmosphere in a literary work. The use of language in literature can either be simple or complex, depending on the author's intentions. According to Sapir (2008), language consists of symbols that are intentionally created by humans to convey ideas, emotions, and desires, and is therefore non-instinctual in nature. Language reflects the diversity of human culture and history, therefore there are so many kinds of languages that exist. Based on Saeed's (2009:15) statement there are two kinds of languages in general: there are literal language and figurative language. Literal language is the use of words in their plain or straightforward meaning,

without any hidden or symbolic meanings. It is the foundation of everyday communication, giving clear and direct communication between individuals. Conversely, figurative language involves the use of words in a non-literal way, often incorporating symbolism to express abstract ideas, emotions, or sensations.

Literature, derived from the Latin word "litteratura," is a written art that expresses feelings through various genres like fiction, nonfiction, drama, novels, poetry, and prose. Long (2015) states all literature holds essential artistic quality which is the expression of life in forms of truth and beauty; or rather, it is the reflection of some truth and beauty which are in the world, but which remain unnoticed until brought to our attention by some sensitive human soul, just as the delicate curves of the shell reflect sounds and harmonies too faint to be

otherwise noticed. It explains that literature is the use of words to express emotions, thoughts, experiences or imaginings in an artistic and aesthetic manner. It distinguishes itself from everyday written material and reveals aspects of truth and beauty that may go unnoticed without the sensitive perception of the human mind. Literature encompasses various written forms, including prose, poetry, and theatrical performances that elicit enjoyment from the audience. All literature is essentially artistic and reflects some truth and beauty in the world, brought to our attention by sensitive human souls.

Semantics is the study of meaning in language and communication. It focuses on how words and phrases convey meanings and how they are used in context. The study of linguistic semantics examines the systematic ways in which languages build the meaning, particularly in words and sentences. According to Griffiths (2006: 1) semantic is one of the two primary subfields of linguistic research. In essence, it is the study of meaning. Semantics, in contrast to pragmatics, which relates language and its circumstances, is defined as the study of word and phrase meaning. Semantics is the systematic study of meaning, and linguistic semantics is the study of how language's structure and convey meanings (Kreidler, 1998). It implies that semantics is a branch of linguistics that is tied to the process of impressing meaning into each word.

Song lyrics are a significant aspect of literature, serving as a means of communication and conveying ideas or emotions that cannot be articulated in words. They differ from other literary works in terms of language and meaning and can also be an individual's articulation of something heard or felt. Dallen cited in Firdaus (2013) to a great extent explains that the act of composing

lyrics serves as a means of communication between those who write them and those who hear them. Typically, they convey some sort of message, encouraging listeners to ponder upon it. This objective and mode of communication arise within the cultural milieu of the creators, influenced by their musical inclinations, era, and other factors.

Many words from the song lyrics carry multiple meanings; this is a word's inherent quality. They acquire meaning because of our interactions with them in social settings. Meaning itself is divided into two categories according to Beard (2004), as stated in Rababah (2015, p. 114) namely conceptual meaning and connotative meaning. The first is conceptual meaning, also known as denotative meaning, which simply refers to what a word signifies or stands for in the real world, or more specifically, the referents of the word. To put it another way, it is a word's dictionary definition or straight meaning. The second meaning is connotative, which includes the associations and emotional connotations that a word may imply in addition to its denotative meaning. Connotative meaning, also known as connotation, is a concept used in semantics to classify different kinds of meaning. The connotative meaning, according to Leech (1981, p. 12), is an expression of virtue that is more communicatively valuable than the denotative meaning.

Connotative meaning can take many different forms. Connotative meaning contains emotional connotation, or the emotions or sentiments that individuals associate with a specific word or phrase. Words like "love" or "hate" frequently elicit powerful emotional responses, demonstrating their emotional meanings. Explained by Chaer (1995, p. 65) that connotative meaning is the meaning that has a sense, whether it is

positive or negative, and occasionally it can be neutral. In addition, Riebs & Reeves (2005) also explains there are three different types of connotative meaning, they are positive, negative, and neutral. For positive (favorable) meaning contains the words that elicit a positive (favorable) feeling from the reader or listener. On the other hand, negative (unfavorable) meaning contains the words with a negative (unfavorable) connotation that elicit a negative emotional reaction from the reader or listener. And lastly, neutral meaning contains the words that have no emotional impact at all for the reader or listener.

The technique of using words to paint a picture is known as imagery. Imagery is using figurative language to evoke a certain feeling in the reader and listener's head and develop an image in their mind. It uses descriptive language to create a mental picture in the reader and listener's mind, appealing to their senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. A reader and listener can visualize the scene because of imagery, which also helps them understand what the lyrics are trying to convey. Using words and phrases to create imagery is a technique for engaging the reader and listener's imagination. Through sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell, imagery enables readers and listeners to experience the writer's feelings as a sensory experience. Imagery in literary work should be able to convey the picture in words therefore the reader and listener can feel the feelings and thoughts of the literary work as they experience it by themselves.

There are plenty of songwriters who produce their own song lyrics as a way to express their feelings. Therefore, the aims of the song lyrics are to make the message of the song lyrics to be conveyed properly so the reader and listener are able to experience the story more vividly. Mimay (2018) explains by

utilizing figurative language, imagery has the ability to form mental depictions of actions, objects, and concepts that evoke a sensory response within us. The effective use of imagery can create a powerful emotional response in the reader and listener, making the story more memorable and impactful. Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson in Perrine's *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry Fifteenth Edition* (2017) classifies imagery into seven types, they are: 1) Visual imagery, which appeals to the experience of sight by way of describing something the author of the literary work sees, 2) Auditory imagery, which associates with sound, such as sound-associated words, 3) Olfactory imagery, which associates with the sense of smell such as fragrance, any unpleasant smells, and the others related to the aroma, 4) Gustatory imagery, which associates with taste, it explains the flavor that is being tasted, 5) Tactile imagery, which associates with tactile sensations or the sense of touch. It also has to do with temperature, such as warmth and cold, or any sensations of touch, 6) Organic imagery, which associates with human body related experiences of the character. It pertains to emotions and internal feelings, and 7) Kinesthetic imagery, which is associated with the sense of movement or tension in the muscles or joints.

The researchers chose this topic after noticing Taylor Swift's ability to weave together intricate narratives and characters within her songs, her skill as a singer and songwriter that succeeded explored with a depth and complexity each theme of the songs that is both relatable and thought-provoking is intriguing. After listening Taylor Swift's *Folklore* for few times, the researchers also came with realization that there was plenty use of figurative language in her song lyrics, and for some listeners it might be too hard to understand which it is keeping them from understanding the

meaning of the songs. Therefore, the researchers will conduct this research by using the seven types of imagery proposed by Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson (2017) and will go in-depth analyzing its meaning by using the three types of connotative meaning proposed by Riebs & Reeves's (2005). Possibly through this research it may help the readers and listeners of Taylor Swift's songs to truly understand the meaning of each song specifically to deeply understand the meaning of songs in Folklore album.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research utilized Taylor Swift's Folklore as the source data. Meanwhile, the research data are collected from the lyrics of the songs in Taylor Swift's Folklore that consisting of 16 songs which relate to which relate to the seven types of imagery according to Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson theory (2017) namely visual imagery, auditory imagery, olfactory imagery, gustatory imagery, tactile imagery, organic imagery, and kinesthetic imagery and the three types of connotative meaning theory proposed by Riebs & Reeves (2005) namely positive, negative, and neutral. This research used qualitative analysis method as explained by Moleong (2009), qualitative analysis research aims to understand phenomena about what subject experiences such as behaviour, perception, motivation, and action which is then being explained in a descriptive way using words.

The data collection procedure of this research includes listening to the songs, continuing by reading the lyrics thoroughly, before conducting the research, the researcher has listened the whole songs from the album more than five times, followed by listening to the whole songs from the album again twice while conducting the research. In total, the researcher has listened the songs for more than seven times. The researchers

then moved into identifying the lyrics from Taylor Swift's Folklore that were consisting of imagery based on Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson theory (2017) and the three types of connotative meaning theory proposed by Riebs & Reeves (2005). The researchers identified the lyrics by reading the lyrics and the theory back-to-back to avoid any wrong identifying of the lyrics.

The data have been collected, some procedure to analyze the data includes reviewing each data, so the data could be categorized into the most suitable type of imagery based on Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson theory (2017). If the researchers found incorrect data, the data would be deleted. This process needed to be done to avoid any incorrect data to be included in the research. The researchers thoroughly analyzed each data by doing the comparison to the theory to check if the data related with the imagery theory introduced by Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson theory (2017). The researchers classified the identified data into the most suitable type of imagery based on Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson theory (2017). The researchers then proceeded to identify the data containing imagery that contained the three types of connotative meaning in accordance with Riebs & Reeves's (2005) theory. The last step is the researchers drew a conclusion based on the data that has been analyzed properly by stating the types of imagery found in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore based on Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson theory (2017) and stating the types of connotative meaning from the imagery found from Taylor Swift's Folklore. Lastly, the researcher explained the way the data represents the whole album.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

After collecting and classifying the data, the researchers found all types of imagery based on Arp and Johnson's

(2017) and all types of connotative meaning based on Riebs & Reeves's (2005) in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. They are as follow.

Out of 7 types of imagery, the researcher found all 7 types of imagery used in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore namely visual imagery, auditory imagery, olfactory imagery, gustatory imagery, tactile imagery, organic imagery, and kinesthetic imagery. Based on the 138 data found, each data classified as follow: visual imagery (50 data), auditory imagery (11

data), olfactory imagery (1 data), gustatory imagery (1 data), tactile imagery (7 data), organic imagery (25 data), and kinesthetic imagery (43 data).

The researchers also found there are 3 types of connotative meaning, all 3 types of connotative meaning used in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore; they are positive, negative, and neutral. Based on 138 imagery data found, each data classified as follow: positive (47 data), negative (66 data), dan neutral (25 data).

**Table 1.**  
**Types of Imagery**

No	Type of Imagery	Total Data
1.	Visual Imagery	50 Data
2.	Auditory Imagery	11 Data
3.	Olfactory Imagery	1 Datum
4.	Gustatory Imagery	1 Datum
5.	Tactile Imagery	7 Data
6.	Organic Imagery	25 Data
7.	Kinesthetic Imagery	43 Data
	TOTAL	138 Data

**Table 2.**  
**Types of Connotative Meaning**

No	Type of Meaning	Total Data
1.	Positive	47 Data
2.	Negative	66 Data
3.	Neutral	25 Data
	TOTAL	138 Data

**Table 3.**  
**The Results of Types of Imagery Found in Song Lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore**

NO	Type of Imagery	Type of Meaning	Total Data
1.	Visual Imagery	Positive	15 Data
		Negative	19 Data
		Neutral	16 Data
2.	Auditory Imagery	Positive	4 Data
		Negative	2 Data
		Neutral	5 Data
3.	Olfactory Imagery	Negative	1 Datum
4.	Gustatory Imagery	Positive	1 Datum
5.	Tactile Imagery	Positive	4 Data
		Negative	2 Data
		Neutral	1 Datum

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6. Organic Imagery	Positive	5 Data
	Negative	20 Data
7. Kinesthetic Imagery	Positive	18 Data
	Negative	22 Data
	Neutral	3 Data
TOTAL		138 Data

### ***Types of Imagery***

According to the data from table 1 about types of imagery, the researchers found there are total 138 data containing the seven types of imagery namely visual imagery (50 data), auditory imagery (11 data), olfactory imagery (1 datum), gustatory imagery (1 datum), tactile imagery (7 data), organic data (25 data), and kinesthetic imagery (43 data). The following discussion explained about each data representative.

The abbreviation used in this research are:

S = Stanza

L = Line

### ***Visual Imagery***

The researchers found that there are 50 data of visual imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The example of visual imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore is as follow.

*"Look at how my tears **ricochet**."*

(Exile, S3, L5)

The example above contains visual imagery as the songwriter attempted to explain the visualization of the character condition. The songwriter then explained that the character was in tears, the detail of the tears was shown by using the word "ricochet" which according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary has the literal meaning of needlework consisting of the interlocking of looped stitches formed with a single thread and a hooked needle, from this example the songwriter used the meaning of the word "ricochet" to helped the visualization that the character was crying non-stop like a looped stitches that connected with each

other and later becoming a single thread, as the tears flown droplet by droplet simultaneously and created a never ending line of tears. Therefore, the example above helps the reader to visualize the condition of the character crying continuously just like a ricochet.

### ***Auditory Imagery***

The researchers found that there are 11 data of auditory imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The examples of auditory imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore are as follow:

***"Hush"***

(Mirrorball, S2, L1)

The example above contains auditory imagery as the songwriter used the word that imitate the real sound. From the example above, the songwriter used the word "hush" as an imitation of the sound that people used to make other silence people. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the word "hush" itself has the meaning as a sudden, calm silence. Therefore, the example above helps the reader to make them feel as if their sense of hearing heard someone said "hush" to them to make them quiet.

### ***Olfactory Imagery***

The researchers found that there is 1 data of olfactory imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The example of olfactory imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore is as follow:

*"The **smell of smoke** would hang  
around this long."*

(Cardigan, S7, L3)

The utilizing of olfactory imagery from the example above is shown as the songwriter attempted to stimulate the reader into smelling the smell of the smoke. By using the olfactory imagery of the smell of smoke, the reader stimulated the kind of smell caused by smoke such as the burning smell or any odor that is caused by the smoke. Therefore, the example above classifies as olfactory imagery as it discussed about the smell of smoke.

### ***Gustatory Imagery***

The researchers found that there is 1 data of gustatory imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The example of gustatory imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore is as follow:

*"Sweet tea in the summer."*  
(Seven, S2, L1)

The example above contains gustatory imagery as the songwriter focused on describing the flavor of the tea. By using the word "sweet" which according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary has a meaning of being, inducing, or marked by the one of the five basic taste sensations that is usually pleasing to the taste and typically induced by sugars (as sucrose or glucose). Therefore, the example above categorized as gustatory imagery as it stimulates the reader the sweet flavor of the tea.

### ***Tactile Imagery***

The researchers found that there are 7 data of tactile imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The example of tactile imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore is as follow:

*"You drew stars around my scars."*  
(Cardigan, S6, L3)

The example above is classified as tactile imagery as it discussed the sensation of being touched and from example above the songwriter described

someone drew around the scars. Generally, in drawing there are utensils touched the surface, for this situation the surface was the scars. Therefore, the example above discussed the sensation of something touching the scars, to draw something around it. It can be concluded that the example above contains tactile imagery as it helps the reader envision the sense of something touched around the scars.

### ***Organic Imagery***

The researchers found that there are 25 data of organic imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The example of organic imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore is as follow:

*"And my words shoot to kill when I'm mad."*

(This is Me Trying, S3, L3)

The example above is classified as organic imagery as the songwriter discussed about the feeling of being mad. Based on Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word "mad" meant intensely angry or displeased, from the example above the songwriter explained that the subject "I" tends to say something hurtful whenever the subject "I" feel angry or displeased. Therefore, it can be concluded the example above contains organic imagery as it discussed the internal feelings of being mad that the character felt.

### ***Kinesthetic Imagery***

The researchers found that there are 43 data of kinesthetic imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The example of kinesthetic imagery in the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore is as follow:

*"Spinning in my highest heels, love."*  
(Mirroball, S2, L4)

The example above is classified as kinesthetic imagery as the songwriter discussed the physical activity that the character did and from the example

above the songwriter used the word “spinning” which is a present participle form of the word “spin”. According to Cambridge Dictionary, “spin” means to (cause to) turn around and around, especially fast. Therefore, it can be concluded that the example above is classified as kinesthetic imagery as it discussed about the physical activity of turning around and around that the character did.

### ***Types of Connotative Meaning***

According to the data from table 2 about types of connotative meaning, the researchers also found there are 3 types of connotative meaning, all 3 types of connotative meaning used in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s Folklore; they are positive, negative, and neutral. Based on 138 imagery data found, each data classified as follow: positive (47 data), negative (66 data), dan neutral (25 data).

#### ***Positive***

The researchers found that there are 47 data of positive meaning in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s Folklore. The example of positive meaning in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s Folklore is as follow:

*“Sweet tea in the summer.”*  
(Seven, S2, L1)

The example is from gustatory imagery contains the use of positive meaning from the word “sweet”. Based on Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word “sweet” means being, inducing, or marked by the one of the five basic taste sensations that is usually pleasing to the taste and typically induced by sugars (as sucrose or glucose). The word “sweet” has the connotation of all the pleasing experiences. Based on the example above sweet tea in the summer insinuating all the pleasant things in the summer. Therefore, it can be concluded

that the word “sweet” classified to carry a positive meaning.

#### ***Negative***

The researchers found that there are 66 data of negative meaning in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s Folklore. The example of negative meaning in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s Folklore is as follow:

*“Screaming, “Give me a reason.””*  
(Hoax, S2, L2)

The example above from auditory imagery shows the use of negative meaning from the word “screaming”. Based on Cambridge Dictionary, the word “screaming” has a meaning to cry or say something loudly and usually on a high note, especially because of strong emotions such as fear or anger. The word “screaming” has the connotation of frustration or anger. Therefore, it can be concluded that the word “screaming” is classified to carry a negative meaning.

#### ***Neutral***

The researchers found that there are 25 data of neutral meaning in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s Folklore. The example of neutral meaning in imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift’s Folklore is as follow:

*“When I passed your house.”*  
(Betty, S1, L5)

The example above from visual imagery shows the use of neutral meaning from the word “house”. Merriam-Webster Dictionary described the word “house” as a building that serves as living quarters for one or a few families. It can be concluded, the word “house” has no emotional impact therefore it can be classified as word with neutral meaning.



## Conclusion

The researchers concluded that there are seven types of imagery and three types of connotative meaning used in the song lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore. The seven types of imagery found were; 1) Visual imagery, which appeals to the experience of sight by way of describing something the author of the literary work sees, 2) Auditory imagery, which associates with sound, such as sound-associated words, 3) Olfactory imagery, which associates with the sense of smell such as fragrance, any unpleasant smells, and the others related to the aroma, 4) Gustatory imagery, which associates with taste, it explains the flavor that is being tasted, 5) Tactile imagery, which associates with tactile sensations or the sense of touch. It also has to do with temperature, such as warmth and cold, or any sensations of touch, 6) Organic imagery, which associates with human body related experiences of the character. It pertains to emotions and internal feelings, and 7) Kinesthetic imagery, which is associated with the sense of movement or tension in the muscles or joints. After finishing the analysis, the researchers found there are total 138 data containing the seven types of imagery, they are as follow: visual imagery (50 data), auditory imagery (11 data), olfactory imagery (1 datum), gustatory imagery (1 datum), tactile imagery (7 data), organic data (25 data), and kinesthetic imagery (43 data).

Based on the analysis of the imagery found from the lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore, the researchers found three types of connotative meaning, they are: 1) Positive meaning contains the words that elicit a positive (favorable) feeling from the reader or listener, 2) Negative meaning contains the words with a negative (unfavorable) connotation that elicit a negative emotional reaction from the reader or listener, and 3) Neutral contains the

words that have no emotional impact at all for the reader or listener. From the total of 138 data of imagery found, the three types of connotative meaning found were: positive (47 data), negative (66 data), and neutral (25 data).

After conducting the research, it can be concluded that the song lyrics of Taylor Swift's Folklore focuses on the visualizing the situation by utilizing the visual imagery. By using visual imagery, the songwriter emphasized the details of the view from the story of the song lyrics which helped the reader or listener to experience the story more vividly and it left an impactful feeling towards the story of the song lyrics itself. Based on the imagery found, the researchers then drawing the conclusion that as most of the theme and story line from the song lyrics discusses about unfortunate stories, then the songwriter focused on utilizing the negative connotative meaning to explain the themes and story line in depth in order to make the reader and listener to be able to grasp the whole meaning of each song and left a strong message about the whole album.

The researchers propose suggestion for other researchers who have the same interest in semantic studies, they can conduct research about types of imagery and types of connotative meaning by using other sources of data such as poems, novel, or any written text. The researchers also hope this research could be useful for the readers and fellow researchers. Lastly, the researchers hope this research can be considered as a supporting guidance for other researchers who wish to conduct research related to types of imagery and types of connotative meaning study.

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