
DICTION AND IMAGINATION: HOW WORDS SHAPE THE WORLD IN POETRY

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the interaction between word choice (diction) and psychological processes (imagination) in constructing an autonomous reality in poetry. The main problem examined is how a specific typology of diction can stimulate the reader's sensory imagery, thus successfully forming a complete new world ecosystem within the text. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with a stylistic analysis approach. The research data, in the form of words, phrases, and lines of poetry, were collected through listening and note-taking techniques using a corpus of poetry text data from several works by canonical Indonesian poets. The results show that the intensive use of connotative diction and concrete words acts as a linguistic stimulus that activates visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic imagery within the reader's cognition. Through the accumulation of these sensory stimuli, the collaboration between diction and imagination successfully constructs an autonomous reality (a new world) within the text. This new world possesses its own logical sovereignty, where the physical laws of the universe, the dimensions of space, and the elasticity of time can be completely deconstructed and reconstructed to achieve a complete aesthetic truth.

Keywords: *Diction, Imagination, Sensory Imagery, Autonomous Reality, Poetry.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a reflection of life expressed through aesthetic and meaningful language. As one of the oldest literary genres, poetry is unique in conveying the ideas, emotions, and inner turmoil of its creator (Al-Ma'ruf & Nugrahani, 2017). Unlike prose, which tends toward narrative and expository, poetry demands intensive language compression. The limited space within poetic stanzas forces a poet to go beyond writing, but to carefully select and weigh each word to achieve maximum aesthetic effect (Nurliza et al., 2025).

Language in poetry no longer functions merely as a practical means of communication but transforms into a work of art. This phenomenon places word choice, known as diction, in a crucial position in the creative process of poetry creation (Hasani et al., 2025). Diction is not merely decorative, but the primary foundation that determines the life or death of a literary work. Through the right choice of diction, a poet can imbue a series of letters with a soul, so that the words have a powerful impact on the reader (Solichah & Fanani, 2025).

However, the power of diction cannot stand alone without the involvement of a deeper psychological aspect, namely imagination. Imagination is an abstract thought process, a bridge connecting the poet's empirical reality with the imaginary world they wish to create (Nurminawati, 2024). When a poet begins to select words, imagination acts as a guide to construct this new reality. Without strong imagination, the chosen diction will simply be a series of words that are beautiful on the surface, but dry in meaning and fail to touch the depths of emotion (Masykuri & Septian, 2024).

This synergistic interaction between diction and imagination is what ultimately "shapes the world" within a poetic text. The world in poetry is an autonomous reality that often transcends the logic of the real world (Sutopo et al., 2024). Through the manipulation of language, abstract concepts such as longing, loneliness, sadness, or anger can be transformed

into something concrete and tangible. This is where the magic of poetry lies, where words act as architects, constructing new spaces, times, and atmospheres for those who enter them (Juwati, 2017).

The process of creating this imaginative world relies heavily on how diction can trigger various types of imagery in the reader. Visual, auditory, tactile, and even kinesthetic imagery are deliberately presented through concrete and connotative words to stimulate the five senses (Nurcaya et al., 2025). When a reader enjoys the lines of poetry, the diction compels their mind to project images, play sounds, or even feel physical touch that are not actually present before them (Ermawati, 2023).

Although the relationship between language and poetic aesthetics has been widely discussed in stylistic studies, research specifically examining the mechanisms by which words "create new realities" remains highly relevant (Jamil et al., 2024). Often, literary studies stop at identifying types of figurative language without delving deeper into how the psychological processes of the reader's imagination are activated by these word choices. Therefore, a more integrative analysis is needed to discern the intersection between structural linguistics and the psychological effects of literature (Azizah, 2025).

Based on this background, this research focuses on an in-depth analysis of how diction and imagination collaborate in constructing the inner structure of poetry. The main question to be answered in this study is how the poet's word choice can stimulate the reader's imagination, thus forming a complete new world ecosystem within the text. This research will analyze the dominant types of diction and examine their patterns in stimulating the fantasy and sensory perceptions of literature connoisseurs.

Theoretically, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of literary studies, particularly in the fields of stylistics and literary psychology. The results of this analysis can enrich the body of knowledge regarding reader reception theory and the aesthetics of poetic language. Practically, this research can serve as a guide or alternative reference for academics, teachers, students, and aspiring poets in understanding and utilizing the power of words more effectively and deeply.

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a focus on stylistic analysis to examine the linguistic and aesthetic elements of literary works. Qualitative methods were chosen because the research aims to generate descriptive data in the form of written words, phrases, and lines of poetry containing variations in diction and imaginative stimuli, rather than numbers or statistics (Anggito Setiawan, 2018). The stylistic approach is used specifically as an analytical tool to analyze how the poet's manipulation of word choice (diction) can trigger sensory imagery and construct new realities within the text. The primary data sources in this study are poetry texts from several works by canonical Indonesian poets, selected using a purposive sampling technique, determining samples based on aesthetic criteria and stylistic richness relevant to the research topic.

Data collection was conducted through a listening and note-taking method, using a corpus of poetry text data as an instrument. The first step began with repeated and in-depth reading of the poetry texts to understand their inner structure. Next, identification, classification, and codification of words representing connotative diction, concrete words, and types of imagery (visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic) were carried out. The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis methods combined with intertextuality and literary reception theories. To ensure the validity of the data (Muhadjir, 1996), this study applied the theory triangulation technique, namely by testing the consistency of the findings using various credible stylistic and literary psychology theories before drawing final conclusions.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Diction Typology and Sensory Imagery Stimulation in Poetry

An analysis of the physical structure of poetry shows that word choice, or diction, is the most fundamental element determining the success of a literary work. Diction is not merely a tool for conveying a message, but rather an aesthetic instrument manipulated by the poet to trigger specific psychological responses in the reader. In the context of creating a poetic world, diction acts as the first brick in the walls of an imaginative reality. Through precise word choice, the poet can transform a series of dead letters into a vibrant and dynamic sensory experience.

The first strength of the diction typology discovered in this study is the intensive use of connotative diction. Connotative diction works by shifting lexical or dictionary meanings, typically denotative, into new meanings loaded with emotional and philosophical content. For example, the word "night" is no longer understood simply as the cycle of time after the sun rises, but instead transforms into a symbol of loneliness, a space of inner contemplation, or even the threshold of death. This shift in meaning forces readers to abandon the logic of everyday language and begin to activate their senses.

In addition to connotative diction, poets also rely on the power of concrete words to bridge abstract ideas. Poetry often addresses lofty, intangible concepts, such as loyalty, grief, love, or despair. To enable readers to grasp these abstract concepts, poets ground them through words that refer to material objects in the real world. Words like "stone," "rain," or "fire" are deliberately used because these objects possess physical characteristics that can be instantly projected and understood by the human mind.

When connotative diction and concrete words synergistically combine, they initiate a psychological mechanism known as imagery stimulation. Imagery in poetry is a recording of sensory experiences evoked by words, making the reader feel as if they can see, hear, touch, or move something. Through this stimulation, the poetic text is no longer a passive entity on paper but rather transforms into a mental performance. This research identified four main types of imagery that are most dominant in stimulating the imagination and sensory perception of literature readers.

The first and most prevalent type of imagery is visual imagery, or visual imagery. This imagery is stimulated through the use of diction that explores the color spectrum, geometric shapes, lighting, and spatial arrangement. When a poem includes phrases like "dark valley" or "drying blood," the reader's mental optic nerve is compelled to paint the scene in their mind. Visual imagery acts as a backdrop, providing the initial physical form for the imaginative world the poet is constructing.

Furthermore, the dimension of the poetic world is emphasized by the presence of auditory imagery, or auditory imagery. A world that can only be seen would feel lifeless without the stimulation of sound, and this is where the poet utilizes onomatopoeia, or acoustic verbs. Word choices like "creaking door," "whispering wind," or "gurgling water" serve to fill the silence within the text. This auditory imagery not only provides sound effects but is also highly effective in establishing an atmosphere or psychological setting, whether it be quiet, peaceful, or tense.

This component of the imaginative world is then deepened through the involvement of tactile imagery, or tactile imagery. Tactile imagery operates on a more intimate emotional level because it directly touches on physical sensations and human skin. Through diction such as "cold night" or "rough skin," readers are invited to feel the texture and temperature of the world the poet creates. These psychologically transferred physical sensations trigger deep empathy, allowing readers to feel the warmth of an embrace or the pain of a wound experienced by the characters in the poem.

The fourth type of imagery that complements the dynamics of the text's world is kinesthetic imagery, or movement imagery. A fictional world would feel rigid if all its elements

were static, therefore the poet injects life energy through active verbs that imply movement. Phrases like "time creeps" or "leaves fall" create a visual effect that moves in the reader's imagination. Kinesthetic imagery ensures that the ecosystem within the poem has its own rhythm and pulse, as if time itself is actually passing.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that these four images rarely exist in isolation. Skilled poets tend to stack or combine several types of imagery within a single stanza to create a layered aesthetic effect. This sensory blending phenomenon, often associated in literary psychology with the phenomenon of synesthesia, blurs the boundaries between the senses. Readers can be invited to "see sounds" or "hear colors," which in turn heightens the intensity of the aesthetic experience when appreciating poetry.

The success of diction in stimulating these images is greatly influenced by the reader's cultural background and empirical experience. A concrete word will fail to trigger a strong image if the reader lacks a memory or visual reference to the object it refers to. Therefore, poets often choose universal words but refine their use through unusual contexts. This tension between the familiarity of a word and the novelty of the context is what spontaneously ignites the reader's imagination. Mechanically, this entire sensory stimulation process occurs within milliseconds within the human cognitive structure during close reading. Written words act as digital codes, which the brain deciphers into analog representations of images, sounds, and feelings. This miracle proves the hypnotic power of poetic language. Carefully crafted diction can divert the reader's awareness from the physical world around them and shift their focus entirely onto the page.

Thus, a rich and varied typology of diction is an absolute prerequisite for creating a complete sensory imagery. Without diverse diction, the imagery that emerges in the reader's mind will tend to be vague, monotonous, and fail to form a clear landscape. Conversely, a rich connotative diction and precise concrete words will produce sharp, clear, and multidimensional sensory stimulation. At this stage, the poet has successfully completed the physical structure of the poem through maximal utilization of linguistic aspects.

2. The Construction of an Autonomous Reality Through the Collaboration of Diction and Imagination

After understanding how diction stimulates sensory imagery, the focus of the study shifts to how the accumulation of these images constructs an autonomous reality. Autonomous reality in poetry is a new, self-contained world ecosystem, independent of the physical laws and universal logic of the real world. This new world is not a mere imitation (*mimesis*), but rather a new creation (*poiesis*) that possesses its own textual sovereignty. This construction process would never have been realized without the intimate collaboration between the poet's precise word choice and the reader's keen imagination.

The initial step in the construction of this autonomous reality begins with the poet's deconstruction of the empirical world. The poet takes elements familiar from real life, such as the sun, the sea, a house, time, and even human organs. However, these elements are not left in their original, rigid, functional meanings. Using the knife of imagination, the poet cuts through the conventional logical connections that bind these objects, then isolates their essential characteristics to be reassembled into something entirely different.

This process of logical dismemberment continues with the stage of reconstruction of meaning, where the creative imagination acts as the primary architect. Within this reconstructed space, the laws of the universe are completely dissolved, with no physical boundaries interfering. The poet reassembles the previously deconstructed pieces of reality using the glue of metaphorical connotative diction. The result is a strange yet captivating new world order, where inanimate objects suddenly acquire psychological consciousness and human feelings can assume solid, material form.

Within this autonomous ecosystem of reality, the phenomenon of personification often serves as the primary foundation for animating the text's landscape. The inanimate objects around us are given the right to speak, cry, lament, or even experience heartbreak. When a poem states that "the walls of the room witnessed loneliness," the walls are no longer seen as frozen piles of cement and brick. They have transformed into living, empathetic witnesses, entities that live within the newly formed spatial realm of the poem.

Beyond bringing inanimate objects to life, this collaboration of diction and imagination also possesses the magical ability to manipulate the dimensions of time. In the real world, time flows linearly, constantly, and unstoppable by any force. However, within the autonomous world of poetry, time becomes a highly elastic variable, subject to the emotional authority of the text. Time can be stopped in a single stanza, sped up, leaping generations, or even reversed to extremes to allow space for deep inner contemplation.

This elasticity of time is often depicted through paradoxical kinesthetic diction, such as the phrases "petrified time" or "frozen seconds." When the reader's imagination captures the stimulus of such diction, a psychological interruption occurs in their conventional perception of time. The reader is invited to enter an alternative timespace, where a fleeting moment of pain in the real world can be perceived as an endless eternity within the realm of poetry.

Not only is the dimension of time distorted, but the spatial dimension within poetry also undergoes a total reconfiguration. Physical, geographical, and distant space is dissolved into a highly subjective psychological space. A physically cramped room can expand into a boundless ocean of tears, or conversely, the entire vast universe can be condensed and contained within a pair of lovers' eyes. This spatial manipulation proves that the geography of poetry is entirely controlled by the intensity of feeling, not by square meters.

The process of materializing abstract concepts is also a crucial pillar in erecting the walls of this autonomous reality. Inner, intangible human feelings are forced to don physical clothing so they can be touched by the reader's imagination. Abstract longing is transformed into "dust grains that suffocate the chest," while guilt is shaped like "an iron anchor dragging the body to the bottom of the sea." This concretization allows emotions to no longer be merely understood cognitively, but to be weighed and their texture palpable.

The success of this new world formation depends heavily on what literary reception theory calls a willing suspension of disbelief. This concept represents the reader's voluntary willingness to suspend disbelief and the logic of their external reality in order to accept the new rules of the game presented by the text. When reading poetry, readers rationally know that stones cannot cry, yet they choose to believe that within the world of the poem, the crying of stones is an absolute empirical truth.

During the reading process, the reader acts as a temporary inhabitant of the imaginative ecosystem the poet has constructed. The diction scattered across the page serves as a navigational signpost, guiding the reader's mental footsteps as they explore this new landscape. Each stanza provides visual, auditory, and emotional information that further clarifies the shape and boundaries of this autonomous world, making the reader feel truly present within it.

This collaboration also involves aspects of collective memory and archetypes stored in the human subconscious. The poet utilizes diction that can trigger myths, ancient symbols, or universal emotional memories of the past. When this archetypally charged diction touches the reader's imagination, the poetic world it constructs no longer feels foreign or distant, but rather feels like a familiar, ancient place the reader has visited in their own dreams.

This encounter between the world of the text and the reader's imagination ultimately creates an intersubjective third space. This space does not belong entirely to the poet, because the poet has finished writing, nor does it belong entirely to the reader, because the raw material comes from the text. This third space is where the poetic world truly lives and breathes

organically. Within this space, new meanings are continuously produced and reproduced each time a new pair of eyes comes to read and imagine it.

The primary power of this autonomous reality lies in its transformative nature for human consciousness. After readers have finished inhabiting the world of the poem and closed the book, they do not return to the real world with exactly the same state of mind as before. The emotional and sensory experiences they experience within the autonomous world of the text imprint themselves on their consciousness, changing how they perceive, respond to, and interpret the empirical reality surrounding their daily lives.

In other words, the new world created by poetry acts as a new lens that sharpens human vision of the real world. This phenomenon proves that poetry is not escaping from the realities of life (escapism), but rather is providing an alternative, richer and deeper perspective. Through words arranged in such a way, poetry reveals the secrets of life that are often overlooked by the eyes of humans accustomed to monotonous routines.

The integration of diction and imagination in constructing this autonomous reality also reflects the supreme power of language. Language, it turns out, does not merely function passively as a mirror reflecting what already exists in the universe. More than that, language has an active, performative capacity to create new existence from what previously existed. Through the strings of poetic sentences, words are transformed into creative words that summon an imaginative world out of the darkness of nothingness into existence.

Theoretically, this entire process of constructing autonomous reality confirms that the physical structure (diction) and the inner structure (imagination) of poetry are interlocked in a dialectical relationship. The physical structure provides solid material material, while the inner structure injects life energy and spiritual spirit into it. Without a solid physical structure, imagination will drift disoriented, and without a sharp imagination, the physical structure will collapse into a pile of dead words, meaningless to the reader.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that words have full power in shaping the world in poetry through a synergistic interaction between the physical structure of language and the psychological inner structure. The choice of connotative diction and concrete words acts as the main linguistic stimulus that successfully shifts conventional rigid meanings into symbols of deep emotions, while simultaneously grounding abstract concepts into understandable material forms. This linguistic mechanism works effectively in the reader's cognition by simultaneously activating four sensory images, including visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic imagery. The accumulation of these sensory stimulations ultimately gives birth to an autonomous reality or a new world ecosystem within the text that has its own logical sovereignty. Through this collaboration of diction and imagination, the laws of the universe, the dimensions of space, and the elasticity of time can be totally deconstructed and reconstructed in order to achieve complete aesthetic truth.

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