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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the grammatical functions and stylistic implications of inflectional morphemes in Owl City's *Ocean Eyes* album (2009). Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research analyzes how these morphological markers contribute to the lyrical structure based on the framework of Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2018). Data were collected from official song lyrics, resulting in 151 identified words containing inflectional affixes. The findings reveal a significantly uneven distribution: noun plural markers are the most dominant category (63.8%), followed by verb inflections (32.5%) and adjective inflections (approximately 4%). The high frequency of plural nouns creates the vast, concrete imagery characteristic of the "dream pop" genre. Additionally, the predominance of third-person singular -s and present participle -ing establishes a narrative tone of immediacy and continuous action. The study concludes that inflectional morphemes in *Ocean Eyes* function not only to maintain grammatical accuracy but also to construct the album's distinct vivid and surreal aesthetic.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji fungsi gramatikal dan implikasi stilistika dari morfem infleksional dalam lirik album *Ocean Eyes* (2009) karya Owl City. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana penanda morfologis tersebut berkontribusi pada struktur lirik berdasarkan kerangka teori Fromkin, Rodman, dan Hyams (2018). Data dikumpulkan dari lirik lagu resmi, menghasilkan 151 kata yang mengandung afiks infleksional. Temuan menunjukkan distribusi yang sangat tidak merata: penanda jamak nomina adalah kategori paling dominan (63,8%), diikuti oleh infleksi verba (32,5%) dan infleksi adjektiva (sekitar 4%). Tingginya frekuensi nomina jamak menciptakan citraan konkret dan luas yang menjadi ciri khas genre "dream pop". Selain itu, dominasi orang ketiga tunggal -s dan partisipel kini -ing membangun nada naratif yang terasa langsung dan berkelanjutan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa morfem infleksional dalam *Ocean Eyes* berfungsi tidak hanya untuk menjaga akurasi tata bahasa, tetapi juga untuk membangun estetika visual dan surealis yang khas dalam album tersebut.



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1. Introduction

Language functions as one of the most fundamental instruments of human communication. It serves as a medium for exchanging information and maintaining social interaction among individuals. Hadi (2018) notes that language enables people to convey messages and share knowledge across different contexts and communities. In addition, Simajuntak et al., (2021) explain that language not only facilitates communication but also allows individuals to express emotions and regulate social relationships. Thus, language is essential for expressing meaning, conveying thought, and sustaining human connection.

Linguistics, as the scientific study of language, encompasses several branches that examine various aspects of linguistic structures and their use. One of these branches is morphology, which focuses on the internal structure of words and the processes involved in their formation. Nisa et al., (2023) describe morphology as the study of how words are built from smaller meaningful units and how these units operate within the linguistic system. Morphological processes, including inflection and derivation, play a significant role in forming new words and grammatical forms. According to Zuhri et al., (2022), word formation in English may occur through several processes such as compounding, clipping, blending, acronym formation, derivation, and inflection.

The most basic unit in morphology is the morpheme, which represents the smallest meaningful element of language that contributes to semantic or grammatical structure (Afria, dkk., 2020 2021). Hasanati & Alim, (2023) define a morpheme as the minimal unit that carries meaning or grammatical function in a word. Morphemes differ in their forms and functions and may be classified into various types depending on whether they can stand alone or must attach to another element.

Morphemes are divided into two major categories, namely free morphemes and bound morphemes (Putri & Ayomi, 2025). Free morphemes are independent units that can stand alone as complete words, such as book, run, or happy. This view is supported by Afri & Maulina, (2021), who state that free morphemes are meaningful units that can occur independently. In contrast, bound morphemes cannot appear by themselves and must be attached to another morpheme to convey meaning. Examples include prefixes such as un- and suffixes such as -s or -ed. As noted by Andadari et al., (2021), bound morphemes cannot stand alone and must attach to another form to create meaning. Ifadloh et al., (2022) further emphasize that both derivational and inflectional morphemes are bound forms because they need to be attached to other morphemes in order to function (Afria, dkk., 2022).

Bound morphemes are divided into two types, there are derivational and inflectional morphemes. Derivational morphemes change the lexical category or the core meaning of a word, (Jelimun et al., 2024) such as in happy becoming happiness. In contrast, inflectional morphemes modify grammatical aspects of a word without altering its lexical category or underlying meaning.

Inflectional morphemes play a crucial grammatical role within a language. Fromkin et al., (2018) explain that inflectional morphemes mark tense, number,

aspect, comparison, or agreement in sentences but do not create new lexical items. For example, the suffix –s in walks marks the verb as third-person singular in the present tense, while –ed in walked indicates past tense. The plural –s in books shows the grammatical distinction of number. Inflectional morphemes therefore encode grammatical relationships and distinctions rather than contributing new semantic content. They are limited in number and consistently used across grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Furthermore Fromkin et al. (2018), state, english contains eight inflectional morphemes. These include the plural marker –s and possessive marker –'s for nouns, the third-person singular –s, past tense –ed, progressive –ing, and past participle –en or –ed for verbs, as well as the comparative –er and superlative –est for adjectives. All of these morphemes appear only as suffixes and function to maintain grammatical agreement and structural coherence in English sentences. Unlike derivational morphemes, inflectional morphemes do not alter the word class of the forms to which they are attached.

Applying morphological analysis to literary works, particularly song lyrics, offers a unique perspective on how these grammatical rules function in creative contexts. Song lyrics are a distinct linguistic register where standard grammatical rules often interact with artistic constraints such as rhythm, meter, and rhyme. Werner, (2021) characterizes lyrics as a "special register" that operates between spoken and written discourse, allowing for deviations from standard norms to achieve artistic goals. Songwriters often deliberately manipulate language to fit the rhythm and emotional tone of the music, resulting in unconventional grammatical structures. While inflectional morphemes are mandatory for grammatical correctness, their presence in song lyrics also contributes to the flow and musicality of the text. A recent study by Istama et al., (2025) supports this, finding that inflectional affixes are frequently used in pop lyrics not only to convey grammatical meaning (such as tense and number) but also to maintain the rhythmic flow of the verses. Therefore, examining inflectional morphemes in a specific album allows for a deeper understanding of how grammatical accuracy is maintained or manipulated within the medium of popular music.

In the present study, the researcher adopts the morphological framework of Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2018) to identify and classify inflectional morphemes found in Owl City's *Ocean Eyes* album (2009). This album was selected due to its rich lyrical content and distinct linguistic style. The framework is appropriate because it offers a clear distinction between derivational and inflectional morphemes and highlights the grammatical functions associated with inflection. The analysis focuses on how inflectional morphemes appear in the song lyrics and how they contribute to grammatical meaning. Through this approach, the study aims to describe the morphological patterns that characterize Owl City's linguistic style in the *Ocean Eyes* album.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, as the primary objective is to describe and interpret the linguistic features of inflectional morphemes rather than to quantify their occurrence. A qualitative approach allows for a detailed examination of morphological forms and explains how each inflection functions grammatically within the specific syntactic context of the song lyrics. The data for this study were obtained from the official lyrics of the songs in Owl City's *Ocean Eyes* (2009) album. The lyrics were accessed from reliable online sources that provide verified versions of the texts. The unit of analysis comprises words containing inflectional morphemes, specifically plural nouns such as *eyes*, *teardrops*, and *fireflies*, inflected verbs such as *seems*, *saved*, and *hanging*, as well as comparative adjectives such as *brighter*.

The data collection process began with a comprehensive reading of all song lyrics to identify any word containing an inflectional morpheme. Every identified form was listed and grouped based on the type of inflection it represents, such as plural *-s*, third-person singular *-s*, past tense *-ed*, present participle *-ing*, or comparative *-er*. All occurrences were recorded during the reading process, including repeated forms found in choruses or refrains. However, since morphological analysis focuses on unique word forms rather than frequency, repeated occurrences of the same inflected form were considered as a single lexical item during the analysis to avoid redundancy.

The analysis was conducted using the morphological framework proposed by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams, who establish that inflectional morphemes function as grammatical markers that modify a word without changing its lexical category or core meaning. After categorizing the collected data based on their inflectional markers, each form was examined within its sentence structure to determine its grammatical function, such as plurality, tense, aspect, subject-verb agreement, or comparison. These interpretations demonstrate how the identified inflectional morphemes contribute to the grammatical cohesion of the lyrics and reflect the morphological system of English as used in the album. The findings from this analytical process are presented in the subsequent section.

3. Result and Discussion

The morphological analysis of Owl City's *Ocean Eyes* album reveals distinct patterns in how inflectional morphemes function to construct the lyrical narrative. A total of 151 words containing inflectional morphemes were identified across the selected songs. As summarized in Table 1, the data demonstrates a significantly uneven distribution. Noun inflections act as the most dominant category with approximately 64% of the total, followed by verb inflections at 32% and adjective inflections at 4%. This distribution aligns with the fundamental definition provided by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2018), who state that inflectional morphemes are bound morphemes strictly used to indicate grammatical function rather than lexical meaning. In this album, the high frequency of these markers confirms that the songwriter prioritizes grammatical precision to ground his surreal imagery.

Table 1
Summary of Inflectional Morphemes in Ocean Eyes (2009)

No	Suffix	Grammatical Function	Number of Words	Percentage
1	-s/-ies	Noun Plural	96	63.8 %
2	-s	3 rd Person Singular	30	19.87%
3	-ing	Present Participle	11	7.28%
4	-ed	Verb Past Tense	5	3.31%
5	-en	Past Participle	3	1.99%
6	-er	Comparative Adjective	3	1.99%
7	-est	Superlative Adjective	3	1.99%
8	-`s	Noun Possessive	0	0.00%
TOTAL			151	100%

The most prominent finding is the high frequency of plural noun markers, specifically the suffixes -s and -es, which appear 96 times in the data. As detailed in Table 2, these markers attach to concrete nouns such as fireflies, teardrops, oceans, and caverns. According to Fromkin et al. (2018), the plural morpheme functions to mark the grammatical category of "number" without altering the syntactic class of the word. Morphologically, the songwriter utilizes both regular suffixes and variations for words ending in -y, such as daisies and sparrows. The overwhelming presence of these plural forms suggests that the lyrics are designed to be highly descriptive and visually dense. In the genre of "dream pop," this accumulation of plural nouns helps create a sense of vastness and abundance. It effectively populates the listener's imagination with multiple physical objects rather than singular or abstract concepts.

Table 2
Noun Plural Inflections

Song Tittle	Base Noun	Inflected Form
Cave In	Diamond, bomb, minute, thought, handlebar, star, intention	Diamonds, bombs, minutes, thoughts, handlebars, stars, intentions
The Bird and The Worm	Segment, eye, friend, trouble, ocean, sea, apple, year, ear, star	Segments, eyes, friends, troubles, oceans, seas, apples, years, ears, stars
Hello Seattle	Hill, highland, parking lot, wave, dock, boat, inlet, interstate	Hills, highlands, parking lots, waves, docks, boats, inlets, interstates
Umbrella Beach	Daisy, chandelier, the drop, thing, wing	Daisies, chandeliers, the drops, things, wings
Saltwater Room	Eye, star, arm, tunnel, subway, wave, cave, sparrow, light	Eyes, stars, arms, tunnels, subways, waves, caves, sparrows, lights
Dental Care	Flower, fight, time, chill, hygienist, vacation, dentist, tootache, thing	Flowers, fights, times, chills, hygienists, vacations, dentists, tootaches, things
On the Wing	Star, hill, height, light, night, top, mile, wall, mall,	Stars, hills, heights, lights, nighst, tops, miles, walls,

	photo, parade, arcade	malls, photos, parades, arcades
Firefliess	Eye, firefly, teardrop, hug, bug, goodbye, dream	Eyes, fireflies, teardrops, hugs, bugs, goodbyes, dreams
The Tip of The Iceberg	Snowflake, shiver, river, rate, ice skate, road, rivulet, lung, glacier, lake, finger, toe, drift	Snowflakes, shivers, rivers, rates, ice skates, roads, rivulets, lungs, glaciers, lakes, fingers, toes drifts
Vanilla Twilight	Star, arm, hand, space, finger, way, day, time, eye, wing	Stars, arms hands, spaces, fingers, ways, days, times, eyes, wings
Tidal Wave	Arm, mirror, promise, track, tie, hope	Arms mirrors, promises, tracks, ties, hopes

In terms of verb inflections, the analysis highlights a strong preference for the present tense. Table 3 shows that the third-person singular marker -s is the most frequent verb inflection, occurring 30 times. Fromkin et al. (2018) explain that this suffix is strictly required for subject-verb agreement in the present tense. Forms such as takes, seems, and glows indicate that the lyrics adhere to this rule to frame the content as current observations. This is further supported by the scarcity of past tense markers, or -ed, which appear only five times. Fromkin et al. (2018) categorize -ed as the primary marker for past time reference. By favoring the agreement marker -s over the past tense marker -ed, the lyrics establish a sense of immediacy and timelessness that allows the listener to experience the songs as unfolding in the moment.

Additionally, the use of the present participle -ing appears 11 times and serves a crucial stylistic function. Words such as dreaming, floating, hanging, and bursting contribute a "progressive" aspect to the lyrics. As noted by Fromkin et al. (2018), the -ing suffix attaches to verbs to indicate continuous action or state. This morphological choice reinforces the ongoing and dynamic nature of the imagery. For example, stars are not just "burst" but are actively bursting, and fireflies are hanging. This creates a continuous and dream-like atmosphere that is characteristic of Owl City's storytelling style.

Table 3
Verb Inflections

Morpheme Function	Song Tittle	Base Verb	Inflected Form
3 rd Person Singular	Cave in	Take, taste, keep, cave in, snap	Takes, tastes, keeps, caves in, snaps
	The Bird and The Worm	Depend, need, sweep	Depends, needs, sweeps
	Umbrella Beach	Stand, gear, start	Stands, gears, starts
	Saltwater Room	do	does
	Dental Care	say, shake, laugh, try, bring, go	says, shakes, laughs, tries,

			brings, goes
	Fireflies	Turn, seem	Turns, seems
	The Tip of The Iceberg	Drop, blow, run, take	Drops, blows, runs, takes
	Vanilla Twilight	chill	Chills
	Tidal Wave	Know, grow, look, break, make	Knows, grows, looks, breaks, makes
Present Participle	Cave In	Die, shine	Dying, shining
	Dental Care	beam	beaming
	On The Wing	Hang, float, dream, tumble	Hanging, floating, dreaming, tumbling
	Fireflies	Hang, burst	Hanging, bursting
	Tidal Wave	Stare, wear	Staring, wearing
Past Tense	Saltwater Room	Open, happen	Opened, happened
	On The Wing	Stay	Stayed
	Fireflies	Try, save	Tried, saved
Past Participle	Dental Care	be	been
	Meteor Shower	be	been
	Tidal Wave	be	been

The analysis of adjectives and possessives offers further insight into the album's grammatical style. As shown in Table 4, comparative *-er* and superlative *-est* adjectives appear infrequently, with only six occurrences combined. These forms correspond to Fromkin et al.'s (2018) description of inflectional suffixes that mark "degree" on adjectives. When used, they serve to heighten the descriptive quality of the lyrics, such as in the forms *brighter* or *coldest*. Interestingly, the data reveals a complete absence of the possessive noun marker *-s*. While Fromkin et al. (2018) list the possessive marker as one of the eight essential English inflectional morphemes, its absence suggests that the songwriter prefers alternative syntactic structures. He likely uses "of" phrases, such as *The Tip of the Iceberg*, to accommodate the rhythmic and syllabic constraints of the musical composition.

Table 4
Adjective Inflections

Morpheme Function	Song Tittle	Base Adjective	Inflected Form
Comparative	Vanilla Twilight	Bright, light	Brighter, lighter
	Tidal Wave	long	longer
Superlative	Dental Care	stupid	Stupidest
	On The Wing	cold	coldest
	The Tip of The Iceberg	thin	thinnest

Overall, the findings demonstrate that inflectional morphemes in Ocean Eyes serve functions that go beyond simple grammatical correctness. While the

morphemes themselves are limited to the standard English inventory defined by Fromkin et al. (2018), which marks number, tense, aspect, and degree, their specific distribution is strategic. The heavy reliance on plural nouns and present-tense verbs works synergistically to build a lyrical world that is vivid, immediate, and crowded with imagery. This perfectly suits the electronic-pop aesthetic of the album.

4. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the inflectional morphemes found in Owl City's Ocean Eyes album (2009) using the morphological framework proposed by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2018). Based on the analysis of 151 identified words, this study concludes that inflectional morphemes play a significant role in constructing the lyrical and grammatical structure of the album. The findings reveal a distinct uneven distribution of inflectional categories, with plural noun markers being the most dominant form, followed by verb inflections and adjective inflections.

The predominance of noun plural markers suggests that the songwriter relies heavily on concrete imagery to convey meaning. By frequently pluralizing objects such as fireflies, stars, and oceans, the lyrics create a sense of vastness and visual abundance that aligns with the "dream pop" genre. Furthermore, the analysis of verb inflections indicates a strong stylistic preference for the present tense. The frequent use of the third-person singular marker -s and the present participle -ing, combined with the scarcity of past tense markers, establishes a narrative tone of immediacy and timeless observation.

From a theoretical perspective, the data confirms that the inflectional system of English, as described by Fromkin et al. (2018), functions consistently within the creative context of song lyrics. All identified morphemes operate as bound grammatical markers that maintain structural accuracy without altering the core lexical meaning of the words. However, the complete absence of the possessive marker -'s highlights how artistic constraints, such as rhythm and meter, can influence morphological choices. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that inflectional morphemes in Ocean Eyes are not merely grammatical requirements. They are strategic tools that contribute to the vivid, dynamic, and surreal atmosphere that defines the album's unique linguistic style.

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