

Các động từ đơn trong những bản tình ca tiếng Anh: những đặc điểm về ngữ nghĩa

Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Hường*, Huỳnh Thị Cẩm Nhung

Khoa Ngoại Ngữ, Trường Đại học Quy Nhơn, Việt Nam

*Ngày nhận bài: 16/07/2025; Ngày sửa bài: 25/08/2025;
Ngày nhận đăng: 17/09/2025; Ngày xuất bản: 28/12/2025*

TÓM TẮT

Bài báo nhằm khám phá các đặc điểm ngữ nghĩa của các động từ đơn trong những bản tình ca tiếng Anh. Dựa trên hệ thống chuyển tác được phát triển bởi M.A.K. Halliday năm 1985, bài báo đã phân tích lời các bản tình ca tiếng Anh theo sáu loại quá trình. Dữ liệu định lượng cung cấp cái nhìn sâu sắc về tần số xuất hiện của không chỉ từng loại quá trình mà còn của các động từ riêng lẻ thể hiện các sắc thái khác nhau trong mỗi bài hát. Phân tích định tính cho phép mô tả sâu sắc ý nghĩa được truyền tải qua ngôn ngữ được sử dụng trong các bản tình ca. Các kết quả phân tích định tính và định lượng cho thấy những động từ này đóng vai trò là công cụ ngôn ngữ mà các nhà soạn nhạc sử dụng để tạo ra những câu chuyện cộng hưởng với những trải nghiệm đa dạng về tình yêu, khiến mỗi bản tình ca trở thành một đoạn kể chuyện độc đáo và dễ hiểu. Mỗi động từ góp phần vào câu chuyện tổng thể, nắm bắt nhiều trải nghiệm và cảm xúc đa dạng xác định hành trình tình yêu.

Từ khóa: *Các động từ đơn, miền ngữ nghĩa, các loại quá trình, hệ thống chuyển tác, các bản tình ca tiếng Anh.*

**Tác giả liên hệ chính.*

Email: nguyenthingochuong@qnu.edu.vn

Single-word lexical verbs in English love songs: semantic characteristics

Nguyen Thi Ngoc Huong*, Huynh Thi Cam Nhung

Department of Foreign Languages, Quy Nhon University, Vietnam

Received: 16/07/2025; Revised: 25/08/2025;

Accepted: 17/09/2025; Published: 28/12/2025

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to explore the semantic features of only single-word verbs in English love songs. Basing on the transitivity system developed by M.A.K. Halliday in 1985, the paper analyzed the lyrics of the English love songs in terms of six types of processes. The quantitative data provides insight into the frequencies of not only each type of process but also of the individual verbs expressing the various nuances in each line of meaning. The qualitative analysis enables an in-depth description of the meanings conveyed through language used in the love songs. The findings show that these verbs serve as linguistic tools that the song-composers employ to craft narratives that resonate with the diverse experiences of love, making each love song a unique and relatable piece of storytelling. Each verb contributes to the overall narrative, capturing the diverse range of experiences and emotions that define the journey of love.

Keywords: *Single-word lexical verbs, semantic domains, process types, transitivity system, English love songs.*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most enjoyable and effective ways to improve learners of English as a foreign language is by listening to English songs. Semantic analysis of single-word verbs in love songs is a valuable tool for unlocking the full emotional and narrative potential of the lyrics. It allows listeners to delve beyond the surface level and appreciate the subtle ways in which language is used to express the complexities and nuances of love. It helps to decipher the specific meanings of verbs, revealing the depth of feelings like longing, desire, or heartbreak, which might not be apparent from a surface-level reading. This analysis goes beyond dictionary definitions,

exploring how single-word verbs function within the context of the songs to paint a vivid picture of the love stories. From all the reasons above, we decide to choose “*Single-word lexical verbs in English love songs: Semantic characteristics*” for our research.

This study explores the semantic features conveyed by single-word lexical verbs in English love songs. It aims to answer two key research questions: (1) What semantic characteristics are conveyed in English love songs, and what is the frequency of each semantic domain? (2) Which single-word lexical verbs are employed to express each semantic domain, and how often is each term utilized?

*Corresponding author.

Email: nguyenthingochuong@qnu.edu.vn

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Verb patterns in English

Numerous studies have been conducted in the realm of English verb patterns, with linguists examining aspects like syntactic features, position constraints, and categorization of verb patterns. The focus primarily centered on classifying these patterns and listing associated verbs without giving due attention to their occurrences. Notably, Hornby¹ outlined 25 verb patterns with illustrative examples. Leech and Svartvik² proposed six basic patterns, emphasizing the versatility of verbs across senses. Leech³ further categorized verb patterns into three types with respective subtypes. Close⁴ took a different approach by identifying five main types and acknowledging the adaptability of verbs to various patterns. Palmer⁵ presented 27 verb patterns without addressing the occurrences or specifying the sources of the selected verbs. In contrast, Biber et al.⁶ departed from the traditional focus on verb frequencies, giving equal weight to verb patterns. They identified five major patterns, each with variations, and meticulously documented the verbs associated with each pattern. Biber et al. emphasized that common verbs could occur in multiple patterns, citing examples like "stand" appearing in three patterns. They asserted the prevalence of the SVOd pattern and identified *meet*, *see*, *bring*, and *get* as common verbs within this structure. They also found it useful to classify single-word lexical verbs into seven semantic domains: activity verbs, communication verbs, mental verbs, causative verbs, verbs of simple occurrence, verbs of existence or relationship, and aspectual verbs.⁶ Notably, their analysis extended to four registers: conversation, fiction, news, and academic prose.

Beyond these linguistic investigations, Vietnamese linguists like Phạm,⁷ Hà,⁸ and Nguyễn⁹ have explored verb patterns. However, their contributions mostly involved reusing

examples and rearranging existing patterns without delving into the contextual circumstances of verb pattern occurrences.

The diverse approaches of various linguists highlight both strengths and weaknesses in studying single-word lexical verb patterns. Remarkably, the exploration of such patterns in English songs, including their occurrences in this register, remains largely unexplored. Recognizing the complexity of language as a behavioral pattern, akin to the absence of Newtonian or Einsteinian laws, Dixon¹⁰ emphasizes the importance of examining verb patterns in songs to understand human behavior, warranting consideration for all types of single-word lexical verb patterns.

These above-mentioned works predominantly describe and classify the verb patterns according to their syntactic features. This studies focuses on the semantic features of the songs; therefore, the framework on which it is based is semantic-oriented, which is presented in detail in the next sub-section.

2.2. Transitivity in systemic functional grammar

The system of transitivity belongs to the experiential metafunction in systemic functional grammar (SFG) by Halliday in 1985.¹¹ Transitivity consists of processes and circumstantial elements. This current study focuses on the verbs; therefore, only the processes are presented in this section.

Processes in language bring to life the world of actions, relationships, and the individuals involved. While there are countless types of activities and ways they can unfold, a linguistic framework called SFG identifies a few distinct types. This system categorizes processes into six main types in English. The primary ones are material, mental, and relational, each having a few subtypes. Additionally, there are three other types: behavioral, verbal, and existential. A process, in this context, consists of three parts: the process itself, the participants in the process,

and the circumstances associated with it. The type of process dictates the number and types of participants involved.

+ **Material processes:** Material clauses capture actions and events, typically involving tangible changes in the physical world that can be observed. These clauses not only encompass concrete, observable changes but also extend to abstract processes. In essence, material clauses help convey both the palpable transformations in the real world and more conceptual, intangible processes.

Price fell throughout this period construes moment in an abstract space of measurement.

The wind destroyed the gazebo, we have Their arguments destroyed her theory.

+ **Mental processes** depict a participant engaged in conscious thought processes, covering activities like perception, cognition, and emotions. The key participant in these clauses is the SENSER, the one who perceives, knows, or experiences emotions. Typically, there is also a second participant known as the PHENOMENON, representing what is being sensed or perceived. This entity can take various forms – it could be a conscious being, an object, a substance, an institution, an abstract concept, or even an action. Grammatically, this flexibility allows for a wide range of units to serve as the phenomenon in mental clauses.

The man knew too much.

Her task interested her.

+ **Relational processes** involve states of being, becoming, or having a certain characteristic, identification, or circumstantial placement. In these processes, a relationship is established between two concepts: a Participant, known as the Carrier, and a quality, circumstance, or possession. The actual process seems to carry less meaning than other types of processes, primarily serving to indicate the existence of the relationship. English categorizes

relational processes into three types: Intensive, Circumstantial, and Possessive. Intensive examples include statements like "X is a," where the focus is on defining or characterizing the participant. Circumstantial relational processes, such as "X is at a," involve situating the participant in a particular circumstance. Possessive relational processes, like "X has a," highlight the participant's ownership or possession of something.

Tom is the leader.

The fair is on Tuesday.

Peter has a piano.

+ **Behavioral Processes:** In addition to material clauses and mental/verbal clauses, there exists an intermediate type with a blend of characteristics – behavioral clauses. These clauses capture human behaviors, encompassing both mental and verbal activities, portraying them as an active form of verbal and mental processes. Behavioral processes share similarities with mental ones, as they involve a participant with human consciousness known as the BEHAVER.

+ **Verbal processes:** Verbal processes are essentially processes of speaking or conveying information. At the core of these processes is the SAYER, the participant responsible for saying, telling, stating, informing, asking, querying, demanding, offering, threatening, suggesting, and similar actions. The SAYER can be a human or a human-like speaker. Additionally, there may be a RECIPIENT, the listener or addressee of the speech interaction. In this way, verbal processes provide a structured framework for capturing the dynamics of communication and the various elements involved in conveying information through speech.

Mary told me a secret.

John said he was hungry.

+ **Existential Processes:** Existential clauses are characterized by having a single participant – the EXISTENT. This Existent can

pertain to a countable entity, an uncountable entity, or an event. The primary purpose of an existential clause is to introduce an Existent into the text, serving as the initial step in discussing or describing it. The identification of an existential clause is often marked by the presence of the word "there," which signifies the process type without functioning as a location circumstance or representing a participant. The process in existential clauses is typically expressed by the verb "be."

There was a storm.

This framework is the basis for the analysis of the collected corpus of English love songs in terms of the semantic characteristics⁶ associated with the single-word lexical verbs.⁶

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of semantic features of verb patterns in English songs. The qualitative component was utilized to identify and categorize the various process types represented by the verbs, drawing on semantic and contextual cues. This approach also facilitated a deeper interpretation of the meanings conveyed by each verb within the lyrical context of individual songs. Meanwhile, the quantitative analysis focused on determining the frequency distributions of the identified semantic domains and tracking the occurrences of specific verbs across the dataset. Together, these methods allowed for both an in-depth exploration of verb meanings and a systematic examination of their usage patterns.

The study isolates single-word lexical verbs. Modal verbs, a category of auxiliary verbs that express concepts like ability, possibility, or necessity and their associations, already analyzed in the previous research.¹² By

focusing on single-word lexical verbs, the study can conduct a more in-depth investigation into their specific semantic characteristics as well as semantic domains.

3.2. Data collection

A total of 250 songs was compiled from various sources and they are featured in collections like "The Best Song Book of All Time",¹³ "World Best Collection's Song Book"¹⁴ (which includes musical scores and chords), "A Collection of Unforgettable Love Songs",¹⁵ "152 Ca Khúc Đẽ Đời Của Tứ Quái Beatles",¹⁶ and "The Best ABBA Collection".¹⁷ The chosen songs revolve around themes such as romantic love, family, friendship, nature, life, homeland, and peace. All lyrics are entirely in English. Many of the songs also have their lyrics printed beneath the staves - sets of five horizontal lines (also called staff) used for writing music.¹⁸

3.3. Data analysis

Our data analysis involved the following steps for each song:

- (1) Multiple readings were conducted to comprehend the song's meaning.
- (2) Clauses containing phrasal verbs and "be" were excluded from the corpus.
- (3) Lyrics were segmented into clauses.
- (4) Each clause was meticulously analyzed and categorized into one of the six process groups.
- (5) Statistical processing was applied to the groups and individual verbs, determining the number of occurrences and percentages.

We can also identify repeated sections through notations like "Back to Ref.", "Repeat **", "Repeat ...", or instructions such as "Repeat verse 1 and Chorus" or with a point of reprise.¹⁹ Additionally, repetition may be indicated by a repeat sign - a colon placed at the end of a passage - signaling that the section should be played again (see Figure 1).

And I Love Her

The Beatles (1964)

Figure 1 shows the musical score for the song "And I Love Her" by The Beatles (1964). The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It features a melody line with lyrics and chord progressions. The lyrics are: "I give her all my love that's all I do - o - / She gives me ever - y - thing And ten - der - ly - y - / Bright are the stars that shine dark is the sky - y - / and if you saw my love you'd love her too o - I - / the kiss my lo - ver brings she brings to me - e - and I - / I know this love of mine will ne - ver die e - and I - / love her / love her / A love like ours could ne - ver die / as long as I have you near me". The score includes a point of reprise, indicated by the first ending bracket at measure 14.

Figure 1. A paragraph with a point of reprise.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Semantic characteristics conveyed in English love songs and frequency of each semantic domain

Table 1. Frequencies of types of processes used in English love songs.

Types of Process	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Material	1740	38.43%
Mental	1775	39.20%
Relational	346	7.64%
Verbal	500	11.04%
Behavioral	106	2.34%
Existential	61	1.35%
Total	4528	100%

The analysis of single-word verbs within the English song corpus provides valuable insights into the predominant types of processes conveyed through lyrics. In total, 4528 single-word verbs were identified, reflecting the diverse range of actions and concepts encapsulated in songwriting. These verbs are instrumental in conveying the narrative, emotions, and themes that characterize the lyrical content of songs.

Mental processes emerge as the most frequently expressed type, with 1775 occurrences, constituting a substantial 39.20% of the total. This prominence indicates the significance of exploring the inner workings of the human mind within the realm of songwriting. Through these verbs, songwriters express emotions, thoughts, and psychological states, providing listeners with a glimpse into the complex landscapes of human consciousness.

Material processes closely follow, with 1740 occurrences, representing 38.43% of the

total. The prevalence of material processes suggests a strong emphasis on tangible actions and experiences within song lyrics. These verbs likely contribute to the vivid depiction of events and actions, grounding the songs in the physical realm and fostering a connection between the audience and the narrative unfolding in the lyrics.

Verbal processes, comprising 500 occurrences at 11.04%, play a distinctive role in conveying communication and dialogue within songs. These verbs highlight the significance of language of communication, contributing to the interpersonal and communicative aspects of songwriting. Whether through direct speech or implied discourse, verbal processes enrich the lyrical content with linguistic nuances.

Relational processes, with 346 occurrences (7.64%), contribute to the establishment of connections, associations, and relationships within the lyrical context. These verbs likely serve to build bridges between ideas, characters, or emotions, enhancing the depth of the narrative portrayed in the songs.

Behavioral processes, represented by 106 occurrences (2.34%), and existential processes, with 61 occurrences (1.35%), contribute to the diversity of the song corpus, albeit with a lesser frequency. Behavioral processes likely encapsulate actions and behaviors, while existential processes may touch upon themes of existence and being, adding layers to the lyrical tapestry.

4.2. Single-word lexical verbs employed in English love songs and their frequencies of occurrences

A further breakdown of each type of process unfolds the frequencies (Table 2).

Table 2. Single-word verbs used in English love songs across six types of processes.

Process	Single-word verbs used in English love songs							
Material	go	243	keep	26	set	6	fry	1
	let	175	close	25	pour	5	fling	1
	hold	159	touch	24	drive	4	gather	1
	leave	136	put	22	carry	3	heave	1
	make	128	stop	22	lay	3	invite	1
	give	104	show	21	throw	3	kick	1
	come	98	start	21	wipe	3	lead	1
	take	78	help	19	pick	2	push	1
	live	72	fall	12	shine	2	send	1
	kiss	70	bring	11	tie	2	shake	1
	lose	48	buy	11	treat	2	skip	1
	look	37	dance	11	wear	2		
	change	35	lie	10	break	1		
	try	28	stay	9	cause	1		
	play	27	wait	7	chase	1		
Mental	love	370	think	59	care	22	imagine	6
	know	348	cherish	45	like	21	understand	2
	want	259	believe	41	forget	20	consider	1
	see	242	remember	37	wish	18	dream	1
	need	120	mean	28	guess	17		
	find	82	worry	25	hope	11		
Relational	get	164	feel	136	seem	32	go	14
Verbal	say	308	sing	20	call	8		
	tell	163			ask	1		
Behavioral	hear	55	cry	51				
Existential	die	47	last	14				

4.2.1. Material processes

The analysis of verbs in English love songs provides a fascinating glimpse into the actions that are commonly associated with expressions of love and romantic relationships. At the top of the list is the verb "go" with a striking 243 occurrences. This suggests a theme of movement and perhaps the desire for adventure or shared experiences in love songs. The act of "let" follows closely behind with 175 instances, indicating a sense of permission or allowing one's partner to be a part of their life.

***Go** west life is peaceful there // **Go** west in the open air // **Go** west where the skies are blue // **Go** west this is what we gonna do.*

(‘Go west’ – Pet Shop Boys)

*So tell me all about it, tell me ‘bout the plans you’re makin’ // Then tell me one thing more before I **go**.*

(‘How am I supposed to live without you’ – M. Bolton, D. James)

*So never leave me lonely // Tell me you love me only // And that you’ll always **let** it be me*

(‘Let it be me’ – The Everly Brothers)

The verbs "hold" and "leave" hold significant positions in the ranking, with 159 and 136 occurrences respectively. These verbs encapsulate the dual nature of relationships, where there is a desire to hold onto love but also an acknowledgment of the possibility of separation. "make" (128 instances) and "give" (104 instances) appear next on the list, emphasizing the actions of creating and providing in the context of love, showcasing a theme of generosity and effort.

***Hold, hold me for a while** // I know this won't last forever // So **hold, hold me** tonight // Before the morning takes you away.*

(‘Hold me for a while’ - Rednex)

*Don't **leave** me this way // I can't survive, I can't stay alive // Without your love, no baby // Don't **leave** me this way // I can't exist, I will surely miss your tender kiss // So don't **leave** me this way.*

(‘Don't leave me this way’ - The Communards)

*I'll buy you a diamond ring, my friend // if it **makes** you feel alright.*

(‘Can't buy me love’ – The Beatles)

*Don't worry. Be happy. Here, I **give** you my phone number // When you worry, call me. I **make** you happy.*

(‘Don't worry, be happy’ – Bobby McFerrin)

*Laura and Tommy were lovers // He wanted to **give** her everything // Flowers, presents and most of all, a wedding ring*

(‘Tell Laura I love her’ – Ray Peterson)

"Come" and "take" both make a prominent appearance, with 98 and 78 occurrences respectively. These verbs suggest a sense of shared presence and mutual exchange in romantic relationships, possibly highlighting its dual meaning of physical presence and reaching a mutual understanding.

*A whole life so lonely // And then you **come** and ease the pain.*

(‘Eternal flame’ – Bangles)

*I wish I never met you, girl // You'll never **come** again.*

(‘Feelings’ – Morris Albert)

*Dreams that I've cherished now have **come** true.*

(‘Over and over’ – David Fannel)

***Take** my hand // **Take** my whole life, too // For I can't help falling in love with you*

(‘Can't help falling in love’ – Elvis Presley)

The verbs "kiss" and "lose" convey the tender and vulnerable aspects of love, with 70 and 48 occurrences respectively. The action of "kiss" symbolizes intimacy, while "lose" touches upon the potential for heartbreak or the fear of losing a loved one.

*Close your eyes and I'll **kiss** you // Tomorrow I'll miss you // Remember I'll always be true*

(‘All my loving’ – The Beatles)

*How much I love you // And if you leave, you'll **lose** a precious love*

(‘You'll Lose a Precious Love’ - The Temptations)

Further down the list, as we dig into the verbs with lower occurrences in the list of material process, we encounter a variety of actions that contribute to the nuanced portrayal of romantic relationships. Verbs like "change" (35 occurrences) and "try" (28 occurrences) hint at the transformative and dynamic nature of love and the dynamics of growth. Relationships often involve adapting to new circumstances and making an effort to overcome challenges, and these verbs encapsulate the resilience and commitment required for lasting connections.

*I wanna tell you you mean all the world to me... // You **changed** my life, you showed me the way.*

(‘Especially for you’ – Jason Donovan and Kylie Minogue)

*It won't be easy, you'll think it strange // when I **try** to explain how I feel // That I still need your love after all that I've done.*

(‘Don't cry for me Argentina’ – Madonna)

*I **try** and **try** to deny that I need you // But still you remain on my mind.*

(‘Can't let go’ – Mariah Carey)

"Play" (27 occurrences) introduces an element of joy and lightheartedness to the narrative of love songs. The idea of playing together suggests a sense of camaraderie and shared laughter, emphasizing the importance of fun and playfulness in fostering a strong bond between partners.

*“You know, someone said “The world’s a stage // and each must **play** a part” // Fate had me playing in love with you.”*

(‘Are you lonesome tonight?’ – Elvis Presley)

The verbs "live" and "keep" appear in the list with 72 and 26 occurrences respectively. "Live" suggests an ongoing and active engagement with life, while "keep" reflects the desire to maintain a connection and preserve the essence of a relationship. These verbs touch upon the enduring aspects of love, where partners strive to live fully together and preserve the bond they share.

*Each day I **live**, I want to be // A day to give the best of me // I'm only one, but not alone // My finest day is yet unknown.*

(‘One moment in time’ – Whitney Houston)

*That **keeps** me searching for a heart of gold // And I'm getting old // **Keep** me searching for a heart of gold // And I'm getting old.*

(‘Heart of gold’ – Neil Young)

"Look" (37 occurrences) and "touch" (24 occurrences) highlight the sensory and perceptual dimensions of love. These verbs suggest a focus on observing and physically engaging with a partner, emphasizing the importance of sight and touch in conveying affection and connection.

The verb "look" suggests the act of seeing and observing, emphasizing the importance of visual connection in romantic relationships. It could denote expressions of admiration, longing gazes, or shared moments of eye contact that deepen the emotional bond between partners.

*You **look** wonderful tonight!*

(‘Wonderful tonight’ – Eric Clapton)

*Hold me now, **touch** me now // I don't want to live without you.*

(‘Nothing's gonna change my love for you’ – Glenn Medeiros)

It's noteworthy that verbs like “dance”, “fall,” “stay,” and “bring” make appearances, adding a sense of movement and shared experiences to the narrative of love songs.

*I should've known better than to cheat a friend // And waste the chance that I'd been given // So I'm never gonna **dance** again // The way I danced with you, oh.*

(‘Careless Whisper’ – Wham)

*When the night **falls**, my lonely heart calls.*

(‘I wanna dance with somebody who loves me’ – Whitney Houston)

*Here in your arms forever I'll **stay**.*

(‘Over and over’ – David Fannel)

*She been gone so long. // But now the train is **bringin'** her home.*

(The 1910 Fruit Gum Co.)

“Stop” (22 occurrences) and “start” (21 occurrences) add a sense of action and decision-making to the narrative of love songs. Relationships often involve moments of pause, reflection, and new beginnings, and these verbs capture the dynamics of transitions and pivotal moments within romantic journeys.

*Now baby, can't **stop** this thing we started // You gotta know it's right // I can't **stop** this course we've plotted, yeah // This thing called love we got it // No place for the brokenhearted // I can't*

stop this thing we started, no way // I'm goin' your way, yeah

*(‘Can't stop this thing we started’ –
Bryan Adams)*

The verbs with even lower occurrences, such as "pour" (5 occurrences), "drive" (4 occurrences), "lay" (3 occurrences), and "wipe" (3 occurrences), bring a touch of specificity to the actions associated with love. In the realm of rare occurrences, verbs like "break," "cause," "chase," "fling," "fry," "gather," "heave," "invite," "kick," "lead," "push," "send," "shake," "skip," and "throw," each appear only once in the list. These infrequent verbs contribute unique nuances, suggesting a broad spectrum of emotions and actions within the landscape of love songs. Whether it's the tenderness of wiping away tears, the spontaneity of throwing caution to the wind, or the intensity of breaking barriers, these verbs add depth to the portrayal of love in song lyrics.

*So **wipe** the tears from your eyes // 'Cause you that you'll survive // **Wipe** the tears from your eyes // And think of the good times.*

*(‘Wipe the Tears From Your Eyes’ –
Caught in the Act)*

*So if you find someone that gives you all of her love // Take it to your heart, don't let it stray // For one thing that's certain // You will surely be a-hurtin' // If you **throw** it all away.*

(‘I Threw It All Away’ – Bob Dylan)

*Time can bring you down // Time can bend your knees // Time can **break** your heart // Have you begging please, begging please.*

(‘Tears in heaven’ – Eric Clapton)

4.2.2. Mental processes

The analysis of verbs of affection and cognition in English love songs provides profound insights into the emotional and intellectual dimensions of romantic relationships. At the forefront is the verb "love," with a commanding 370 occurrences. This emphasizes the central theme of love songs –

expressing and celebrating the powerful and transformative emotion of love. Whether it is the joy of new love or the enduring nature of a long-term commitment, the omnipresence of "love" reflects its fundamental role in the lyrical landscape of romantic music.

***Love** me tender, **love** me sweet. Never let me go. // You have made my life complete. And I **love** you so. // **Love** me tender, **love** me true, all my dreams fulfilled. // For, my darling, I **love** you, and I always will. // **Love** me tender, **love** me long. Take me to your heart. // For it's there that I belong, and we'll never part.*

(‘Love me tender’ – Elvis Presley)

Following closely is the verb "know" with 348 occurrences, suggesting a deep connection between love and understanding. In the context of love songs, "know" conveys not just factual knowledge but a profound comprehension of one's partner – their desires, dreams, and intricacies. It signifies the intimacy that comes with truly knowing and being known by someone in a romantic relationship.

*Girl, somehow I **know** deep inside your heart that you need my tender touch.*

(‘Girl, you are my love’ – Pink Boy)

*Baby! When I met you, there was peace, I **know**.*

*(‘Islands in the stream’ – Kenny Rogers
Duet with Dolly Parton)*

*If we hold on together, I **know** our dreams will never die.*

(‘If we hold on together’ – Diana Ross)

*I'll never let you see // the way my broken heart is hurtin' me. // I've got my pride and I **know** how to hide all my sorrows and pain // I'll do my crying in the rain.*

(‘Crying in the rain’ – Everly Brothers)

The verbs "want" (259 occurrences) and "see" (242 occurrences) encapsulate the desirous and visual aspects of love. "Want" expresses

the desire and longing inherent in romantic relationships, where the object of affection becomes a source of yearning and fulfillment. On the other hand, "see" goes beyond the literal act of sight, implying a perceptive understanding and recognition of one's partner.

*I **want** to call the stars down from the sky // I **want** to live a day that never dies // I **want** to change the world only for you // All the impossible I **want** to do.*

*(‘When you tell me that you love me’ –
Diana Ross)*

*I close my eyes and **see** your face.*

*(‘From souvenir to souvenir’ –
Demis Roussos)*

*I **see** the light of love in your eyes.*

(‘Over and over’ – David Fannel)

*I **saw** my darling and my best friend walking in.*

(‘Sad movies’ – Sue Thomson)

"Need" (120 occurrences) and "find" (82 occurrences) introduce a sense of necessity and discovery. The verb "need" suggests the indispensability of a partner in one's life, highlighting the emotional reliance and interdependence that often characterize deep romantic connections. Meanwhile, "find" implies a journey of discovery, where love becomes a quest and the partner a cherished treasure unearthed.

*If your broken heart should **need** repaired,
then I’m the man to see, I whisper sweet things. //
You tell all your friends, and they’ll come runnin’
to me.*

(‘Handy man’ – James Taylor)

*It won’t be easy, you’ll think it strange //
when I try to explain how I feel // That I still **need**
your love after all that I’ve done.*

(‘Don’t cry for me Argentina’ – Madonna)

*But when I get home to you // I **find** the
thing that you do // will make me feel alright.*

(‘A hard day’s night’ – The Beatles)

The verbs "think" (59 occurrences) and "believe" (45 occurrences) bring cognitive aspects into the emotional landscape of love songs. "Think" reflects the intellectual engagement within relationships, encompassing reflections, considerations, and contemplations about one's partner. "Believe," on the other hand, delves into the realm of faith and trust, underlining the importance of firm belief in the foundation of a romantic connection.

*You **thought** that I would die without you.
But I’m livin’.*

(‘Survivor’ – Destiny’s Child)

*Oh, yeah, I’ll tell you somethin’ // I **think**
you’ll understand // When I say that somethin’ //
I want to hold your hand // I want to hold your
hand.*

(‘I want to hold your hand’ – The Beatles)

*There can be miracles // When you **believe** //
Though hope is frail, it’s hard to kill // Who
knows what miracles you can achieve? // When
you **believe**, somehow you will // You will when
you **believe**.*

*(‘When you believe’ - Mariah Carey and
Whitney Houston)*

Expressions of nostalgia and memory are captured by verbs like "cherish" (41 occurrences) and "remember" (37 occurrences). "Cherish" implies the intentional holding dear of those memories and the person associated with them, while "remember" evokes moments of shared history and experiences.

***Cherish** the love // **Cherish** the life. //
Cherish the love we have // We should **cherish**
the life we live.*

(‘Cherish’ - Kool and The Gang)

*Memory, all alone in the moonlight // I can
dream of the old days // Life was beautiful then //
I **remember** the time I knew what happiness was //
Let the memory live again.*

(‘Memory’ – Barbra Streisand)

The verbs "mean" (28 occurrences), "worry" (25 occurrences), and "care" (22 occurrences) add nuances to the emotional landscape. "Mean" suggests the significance and intentionality behind words and actions in the context of love. "Worry" and "care" emphasize the concern and consideration that are integral to sustaining a healthy and loving relationship.

*I didn't **mean** to disappoint you.*

(‘One more try’ – Timmy T.)

*I don't know how I ever lived before // You are my life, my destiny // Oh my darling, I love you so // You **mean** everything to me.*

(‘You mean everything to me’ - Neil Sedaka)

*In every life we have some trouble // When you **worry**, you make it double // Don't **worry**, be happy.*

(‘Don't worry, be happy’ – Bobby McFerrin)

*And your eyes // They tell me how much you **care** // Oh yes, you will always be my endless love.*

(‘Endless love’ – Diana Ross and Lionel Richie)

In the realm of emotions, verbs like "like" (21 occurrences), "wish" (18 occurrences), and "hope" (11 occurrences) convey various shades of sentiment. While "like" suggests a lighter, more casual affection, "wish" and "hope" bring in elements of aspiration and optimism, hinting at the dreams and desires for the future within a romantic partnership.

*I don't **like** to sleep alone // Stay with me, don't go.*

(‘I don't like to sleep alone’ – Paul Anka)

*... How I **wish**, how I **wish** you were here // We're just two lost souls swimming in a fishbowl, year after year // Running over the same old ground, what have we found? // The same old fears, **wish** you were here.*

(‘Wish You Were Here’ – Pink Floyd)

*You may say I'm a dreamer // But I'm not the only one // I **hope** someday you'll join us // And the world will be as one.*

(‘Imagine’ – John Lennon)

Among the verbs with lower occurrences, "imagine" (6 occurrences), "understand" (2 occurrences), "consider," and "dream" (1 occurrence each) touch upon deeper facets of cognition, creative thinking, and thoughtful reflection within the context of love songs.

***Imagine** there's no heaven // It's easy if you try // No hell below us // Above us, only sky // ... **Imagine** there's no countries // It isn't hard to do // Nothing to kill or die for // And no religion, too // **Imagine** all the people // Livin' life in peace.*

(‘Imagine’ – John Lennon)

*Touch me, it's so easy to leave me // All alone with the memory // Of my days in the sun // If you touch me, you'll **understand** what happiness is // Look, a new day has begun.*

(‘Memory’ – Barbra Streisand)

*... the only thing that I've been **dreaming** of is touching you!*

(‘Blue moon’ – Irene Care)

*You **consider** me the young apprentice.*

(‘Wrapped around your finger’ – The Police)

4.2.3. Relational processes

The structure of subject + verb + complement is a common linguistic framework in love songs, where artists often strive to convey the depth and complexity of human relationships through concise and evocative language. The examination of verbs of relation in English love songs reveals a captivating exploration of the dynamics between individuals within romantic relationships. Topping the list is the verb "get," appearing 164 times. This versatile verb can take on various meanings, and in the context of love songs, it often signifies the evolving nature of relationships. From getting to know someone to getting closer emotionally, "get" embodies the

journey and progression inherent in romantic connections.

***Gettin'** to know you, // **Gettin'** to know all about you. // **Gettin'** to like you, // **Gettin'** to hope you like me.*

***Gettin'** to know you, // **Gettin'** to feel free and easy. // When I am with you, // **Gettin'** to know what to say.*

(‘Getting to Know You’ – Andy Williams)

*You’ve **got** me going crazy.*

(‘Right here waiting for you’ – Richard Marx)

*We’ve **got** everything going on and on and on.*

(‘Everytime you go away’ – Paul Young)

Following closely is the verb "feel" with 136 occurrences. "Feel" dives deep into the emotional realm, portraying the sentiment and subjective experiences within relationships. Whether it is expressing affection, passion, or vulnerability, this verb serves as a conduit for articulating the intricate nuances of emotions shared between partners. The prevalence of "feel" indicates the significance of emotional connection, capturing the myriad sentiments that define romantic relationships. From the warmth of love to the pangs of heartache, "feel" encapsulates the subjective and intimate aspects of human connection.

*Said I loved you but I lied // Cause this is more than love I **feel** inside // Said I loved you but I was wrong // Cause love could never ever **feel** so strong.*

(‘Said I love you ... but I lied’ – Michael Bolton)

*My love is just for you. // I’ll be **feeling** blue living without you.*

(‘Girl, you are my love’ – Pink Boy)

*I want to hold you close under the sun // I want to kiss your smile and **feel** the pain.*

(‘When you tell me that you love me’ – Diana Ross)

The verb "seem," appearing 32 times, introduces an element of perception and interpretation to the portrayal of relationships. "Seem" suggests that love is not always straightforward; there is an aspect of subjectivity and interpretation in how individuals perceive and understand their connection with one another. "Seem" introduces an element of uncertainty and perceptual variation, acknowledging that what may appear on the surface might not always reflect the true essence of a relationship. This verb adds depth by acknowledging the complexity of emotions and the nuances that come with interpreting the behaviors and expressions of a partner.

*You **seemed** to change, you acted strange. // Why, I’ll never know.*

(‘Are you lonesome tonight?’ – Elvis Presley)

*If I had to live my life without you near me, // The days would all be empty // The nights would **seem** so long.*

(‘Nothing’s gonna change my love for you’ – Glenn Medeiros)

*Life **seems** dead and so unreal.*

(‘You don’t have to say you love me’ – Dusty Springfield)

With the lowest tendency for occurrence in the Relational group, the verb "go" (appearing 14 times) is typically used to "describe a change towards some undesirable state", and "describes both changes experienced by humans and natural processes that happen to other things."⁶

*Oceans apart, day after day, and I slowly **go** insane // I hear your voice on the line, but it doesn’t stop the pain.*

(‘Right here waiting for you’ – Richard Marx)

*...nothing could **go** wrong because I knew someday we’re gonna love again.*

(‘Someday we’re gonna love again’ – The Searchers)

4.2.4. Verbal processes

The analysis of verbs of verbal processes in English love songs sheds light on the importance of communication and expression within romantic relationships. Reaching the top of the list is the fundamental verb "say," appearing a substantial 308 times. This emphasizes the significance of verbal communication as a primary means of conveying emotions, thoughts, and declarations of love within the lyrical context. "Say" encapsulates a broad spectrum of verbal expressions, ranging from simple affirmations to profound declarations of affection that are integral to the narrative of love songs.

*You **said** you love me.*

(‘One more try’ – Timmy T.)

*All we are **saying** is give peace a chance.*

(‘Give peace a chance’ – The Beatles)

*Hi, hi, hi, beautiful Sunday // This is my, my, my beautiful day // When you **say, say, say,** **say** that you love me // Oh, my, my, my, it's a beautiful day.*

(‘Beautiful Sunday’ - Daniel Boone)

*I don't know why you **said** goodbye.*

(‘Boulevard’ – Dan Byrd)

Following "say" is the verb "tell," with 163 occurrences. While "say" has a general connotation of expressing words, "tell" introduces a sense of directed communication. In the context of love songs, "tell" often implies a more intentional and personal form of expression, where individuals communicate directly with their partners. Whether it is telling someone you love them or revealing personal sentiments, this verb adds a layer of purposeful communication to the lyrical portrayal of romantic relationships.

*Now I need to **tell** you this // There's no other love like your love // And I, as long as I live, // I'll give you all the joy // My heart and soul can give.*

(‘Truly’ - Lionel Richie)

*I'm shining like a candle in the dark // When you **tell** me that you love me.*

(‘When you tell me that you love me’ – Diana Ross)

***Told** you once, I won't **tell** you again.*

(‘Roxanne’ – The Police)

The verb "sing," with 20 occurrences, introduces a musical dimension to the verbal processes within love songs. While singing is a form of expression, it goes beyond mere spoken words, incorporating melody and rhythm to convey emotions. "Sing" is often associated with expressing love through song, turning verbal communication into a creative and melodic experience. This inclusion showcases the diversity of ways artists portray verbal expression in the realm of love songs.

***Sing, sing** a song // **Sing** out loud, **Sing** out strong // **Sing** of good things not bad // **Sing** of happy not sad.*

***Sing, sing** a song // Make it simple to last your whole life long // Don't worry that it's not good enough // for anyone else to hear // Just **sing, sing** a song.*

***Sing, sing** a song // Let the world **sing** along // **Sing** of love there could be // **Sing** for you and for me.*

(‘Sing a song’ – The Carpenters)

"Call" follows with 8 occurrences, suggesting a form of direct communication that may involve reaching out to a partner via phone or another means. It is also used to designate as something specified. The verb "ask" appears once, indicating a more specific form of verbal engagement where questions are posed. This might involve seeking clarification, expressing curiosity, or making requests within the context of a romantic relationship.

*You were leaving in the morning // But you promised you would **call** me.*

(‘Hey hello’ – Joy)

*Don't worry. Be happy. Here, I give you my phone number // When you worry, **call** me. I make you happy.*

(‘Don't worry, be happy’ – Bobby McFerrin)

*They **call** us irresponsible.*

(‘We built this city’ – Starship)

*We go to a party, and everyone turns to see // This beautiful lady is walking around with me, // And then she **asks** me “Do you feel alright? // And I say “Yes, I feel wonderful tonight.*

(‘Wonderful tonight’ – Eric Clapton)

4.2.5. Behavioural processes

The examination of verbs associated with psychological and physical human behavior in English love songs provides a window into the emotional and visceral experiences within romantic relationships. Topping the list is the verb "hear" with 55 occurrences. This verb suggests the significance of listening to one's partner in understanding their emotions and fostering a deeper connection. In the realm of love songs, "hear" goes beyond the literal act and extends to the attentive and empathetic listening that is crucial for emotional intimacy.

*I **hear** a birdie up in a tree, I hear [him saying this melody] // Oh! What a feeling! My heart was reeling.*

(‘My home town’ – Paul Anka)

*... And I can **hear** sweet voices singing ‘Ave Maria’.*

(‘The wedding’ – Julie Rogers)

Following closely is the verb "cry" with 51 occurrences. The prominence of "cry" highlights the emotional depth and vulnerability that often characterize romantic relationships. Whether expressing tears of joy, sorrow, or passion, the act of crying becomes a poignant symbol of the emotional highs and lows experienced within the context of love. This verb speaks to the raw and authentic nature of human emotions, adding a layer of realism to the portrayal of love in song lyrics.

*Sad movies always make me **cry**.*

(‘Sad movies’ – Sue Thomson)

*I can never love again the way I loved you. Oh! // I can never **cry** again like I did when I left you... // I can never love again now that we're apart.*

(‘Foolish beat’ – Adbbie Gibson)

*Don't **cry** for me, Argentina // The truth is, I never left you // All through my wild days, my mad existence. // I kept my promise // Don't keep your distance.*

(‘Don't cry for me, Argentina’ – Madonna)

4.2.6. Existential processes

The analysis of verbs associated with existential processes in English love songs brings forth a contemplative and profound dimension to the portrayal of romantic relationships. Topping the list is the verb "die" with 47 occurrences. The use of "die" in love songs conveys a metaphorical sense of intensity and passion, suggesting a depth of emotional connection. In the lyrical realm, the idea of "dying" for love often symbolizes the willingness to sacrifice, undergo significant changes, or experience a profound transformation in the pursuit of a deep and meaningful connection.

*If we hold on together, // I know our dreams will never **die**.*

(‘If we hold on together’ – Diana Ross)

*Tell Laura not to cry, // my love for her will never **die**.*

(‘Tell Laura I love her’ - ?)

*I know this love of mine will never **die** // And I love her.*

(‘And I love her’ – The Beatles)

Following "die" is the verb "last" with 14 occurrences. The use of "last" introduces a temporal aspect, suggesting the endurance and longevity of love. In the context of love songs, the verb "last" implies a desire for a lasting and

enduring connection, emphasizing the hope for a love that stands the test of time. It adds a sense of permanence to the narrative, underscoring the wish for a love that continues to thrive and persist beyond the transient moments.

Love just comes and it goes.// How long it's gonna last, say, nobody knows.

(‘That’s the way love is’ – Marvin Gaye)

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The semantic characteristics of single-word verbs in English love songs intricately unveils the multifaceted and dynamic nature of romantic relationships expressed through the medium of music. The tapestry woven by these verbs reveals a rich array of emotions, actions, and themes, with a noteworthy emphasis on mental processes, constituting almost half of the six types examined. Significantly, the scrutiny of mental verbs in English love songs illuminates the intricate interplay between emotions and cognition in portraying romantic relationships. From the foundational role of "love" to nuanced expressions of understanding, "desire", and "care", these verbs collectively construct a vivid and multifaceted portrayal of the human experience of love narrated through musical expression. Further contributing to the narrative, the prevalence of "say" and "tell" highlights the central role of verbal communication in love songs. Whether delivering a declaration of love or a heartfelt confession, the repetition of these verbs indicates the significance of verbal expression in shaping the love song narrative. Then, verbs of existential processes serve as a linguistic vehicle to convey the intensity, endurance, and transformative power embedded within romantic relationships, adding depth and nuance to lyrical expressions of love. In addition, examining behavioral processes, such as "hear" and "cry" reveals a recurring preference among songwriters for these verbs in capturing the essence of love. Finally, the repetitive use of existential process verbs reinforces the artists' inclination to articulate the intensity, depth, and longevity of romantic feelings.

This study is restricted to only the verb element of the songs. Future studies should study the other components such as the participants and the circumstances. Such studies will certainly contribute to more significant insights into the language of love songs as expressed through English, an international language.

REFERENCES

1. A. S. Hornby. *A guide to patterns and usage in English*, The English Language Book Society and Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1953.
2. G. N. Leech, J. Svartvik. *A communicative grammar for English*, Longman, London, 1974.
3. G. N. Leech. *An A-Z of English grammar and usage*, Edward Arnold, London, 1989.
4. R. A. Close. *A reference grammar for students of English*, Longman, London, 1975.
5. H. E. Palmer. *A grammar of English words*, Longman, London, 1993.
6. D. Biber, S. Johansson, G. Leech, S. Conrad, E. Finegan. *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*, Longman, London, 1999.
7. V. B. Phạm. *Ngữ pháp Tiếng Anh hiện đại (A modern English grammar)*, Nxb Hải Phòng, Hải Phòng, 1997.
8. V. B. Hà. *Những mẫu câu tiếng Anh (Patterns of English)*, Nxb Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1998.
9. H. L. Nguyễn. *An outline of Syntax*, Nxb Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2000.
10. R. M. W. Dixon. *A new approach to English grammar on semantic principles*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992.
11. M. A. K. Halliday. *Introduction to functional grammar*, Arnold, London, 1985.
12. T. N. H. Nguyen, T. C. N. Huynh. Lexical associations of modal verbs in English love songs, *Quy Nhon University Journal of Science*, **2022**, 16(2), 5-21.

13. V. P. Nguyen, M. Trang, T. Vinh, B. Nga. *The best song book of all time*, Youth Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003.
14. V. P. Nguyen. *World best collection's song book (with musical scores and chords)*, Youth Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000.
15. C. Yen. *A collection of unforgettable love songs*, Youth Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004.
16. T. Kỳ. *152 ca khúc để đời của Tứ quái Beatles*, Nxb 'Sống', Huế, 1973.
17. V. P. Nguyen. *The best ABBA collection*, Youth Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004.
18. A. Cowie. *Oxford advanced Learner's Encyclopedic Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1993.
19. T. T. Đào, M. T. Đỗ, B. Đức. *Thuật ngữ và ký hiệu âm nhạc thường dùng*, Nxb Văn hóa, Hà Nội, 1984.



© 2025 by the authors. This Open Access Article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).