

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Ballet and Romantic Intimacy in the Webtoon "If It's Okay With You, Teacher"

Siti Marina Haniwati^{1*}, Naya Amelia Cahya Putri²

¹Institut Prima Bangsa, Indonesia

²Institut Prima Bangsa, Indonesia

* sitimarinahaniwati@gmail.com, nayaamelia41@gmail.com

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direction, and gradual shifts in color tone. The vertical-scrolling format further functions as a semiotic resource that structures narrative rhythm and emotional progression. The study concludes that visual grammar provides an effective framework for understanding how static digital images are able to construct the illusion of motion and articulate invisible emotional states. This research contributes to multimodal studies by demonstrating how dance functions as a visual metaphor for emotional growth and interpersonal connection in digital storytelling.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how a digital comic represents dynamic bodily movement and abstract emotional experience within a static visual medium. The object of analysis is the one-shot Webtoon *If It's Okay With You, Teacher* by Studio Paran (2022), which depicts the transformation of a ballet technician into an emotionally expressive artist. The main problem addressed in this research is the semiotic challenge of visualizing fluid ballet movement and the intangible emotion of first love through static images. This research employs a qualitative approach using Multimodal Discourse Analysis, focusing on visual grammar. The analysis explores representational, interactive, and compositional meanings in selected panels, paying particular attention to bodily posture, gaze, implied motion, spatial arrangement, and color composition. The findings showed that the Webtoon successfully simulates movement through implied vectors, sequential panel structure, and expressive body orientation, while emotional transformation was conveyed through facial expressions, gaze

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly reshaped contemporary visual storytelling, particularly through the emergence of digital comics or Webtoons. Originating in South Korea, Webtoons have evolved into a global cultural product characterized by their vertical-scrolling format, platform-based distribution, and integration of textual and visual elements within a single digital interface. Unlike printed comics that rely on fixed page layouts, Webtoons are designed for continuous scrolling on digital screens, allowing creators to manipulate pacing, spatial distance, and narrative rhythm more flexibly. This format enables the use of elongated panels, visual pauses, and gradual scene transitions, which contribute to deeper emotional immersion and reader engagement. Consequently, Webtoons function as a multimodal medium, in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources rather than verbal language alone.

Previous studies have demonstrated that Webtoons operate as complex multimodal texts that rely heavily on visual strategies to convey narrative meaning and emotional depth. Research on Line Webtoon content indicates that popular Webtoons frequently emphasize themes of personal growth, emotional struggle, and romantic relationships, using visual elements to establish strong affective connections with readers (Nurohmah et al., 2024). Similarly, multimodal analyses of Webtoons such as *Days of Hana* and *Weak Hero* reveal that facial expressions, camera angles, and color palettes play a crucial role in representing abstract concepts such as discrimination, power

relations, and emotional vulnerability (Hakim, 2025.; Zahra et al., 2025). These findings suggest that webtoons depend on visual grammar to communicate meanings that cannot be fully articulated through text.

Within this context, this research focuses on the one-shot Webtoon *If It's Okay With You, Teacher* (선생님만 관장다면) by Studio Paran (2022). The Webtoon tells the story of Kang Seo-Eun, a ballet technician and choreographer who struggles to translate the abstract feeling of “first love” into a choreographic concept. As a one-shot narrative, the Webtoon condenses character development and emotional transformation into a limited sequence of panels, thereby intensifying the role of visual signs in conveying meaning. Ballet serves not only as the thematic background of the story but also as a visual language through which the protagonist’s internal conflict and emotional growth are expressed.

The main semiotic challenge in this Webtoon lies in representing two inherently intangible dimensions: dynamic bodily movement and abstract emotional experience. Ballet is defined by motion, rhythm, and fluidity, whereas Webtoons consist of static images arranged sequentially. At the same time, first love is an internal emotional state that cannot be directly visualized. As a result, the Webtoon must rely on visual strategies such as implied motion lines, expressive body posture, gaze direction, and color composition to simulate movement and convey emotion. This challenge reflects a broader issue in multimodal discourse studies: how static visual media can construct the illusion of movement and make invisible emotions perceptible to readers.

To address this issue, this research employs Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as its analytical framework, with a specific focus on visual grammar developed by Kress and van Leeuwen. MDA views meaning-making as a process that emerges from the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, including language, image, color, and spatial arrangement. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, images are structured systems of meaning governed by social conventions, similar to linguistic grammar (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020). Visual grammar provides analytical tools to examine how images construct meaning through three metafunctions: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings.

Representational meaning concerns how participants, actions, and events are depicted visually. Within this metafunction, narrative processes such as action processes and reactional processes are particularly relevant. Action processes depict physical movement through vectors and body orientation, while reactional processes represent psychological or emotional responses through gaze and facial expression (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020). These concepts are essential for analyzing how ballet movements and emotional interactions are visualized in *If It's Okay With You, Teacher*. Studies on memes, digital comics, and social media discourse have shown that visual and verbal elements work together to create coherent narratives and emotional meanings (Ejaz & Mariam Bashir, 2025; Paola, 2024).

Interactive meaning concerns the relationship established between represented participants and viewers through visual elements such as gaze, social distance, perspective, and angle. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2020), these visual resources determine how viewers are positioned in relation to the depicted characters and influence the degree of emotional involvement and identification. A direct gaze can create a sense of intimacy and engagement, while an indirect gaze positions viewers as observers of the narrative. Likewise, variations in shot distance and perspective construct different levels of social proximity and emotional connection between the audience and the represented participants. In multimodal texts, interactive meaning plays a significant role in guiding audience interpretation and shaping emotional responses to visual narratives. Studies on multimodal communication have demonstrated that visual interaction, including gaze patterns, framing, and viewer positioning, contributes to meaning-making by establishing relationships between participants and audiences (Lityaningrum, 2021; Stewart, 2024). In digital storytelling, these interactive elements also support narrative coherence and audience immersion by encouraging readers to engage emotionally with characters and events (Meier, 2022). Therefore, the concept of interactive meaning is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for examining how readers are invited to experience Kang Seo-Eun’s emotional journey and artistic transformation throughout the Webtoon.

Compositional meaning addresses how visual elements are arranged within a frame or sequence, including information value, salience, and framing. In digital comics, compositional choices such as panel size, spatial gaps, and color transitions play a crucial role in shaping narrative flow and emotional pacing. Research on multimodal storytelling emphasizes that coherence in digital narratives is achieved through the rhythmic integration of visual elements across sequences (Meier, 2022). This perspective is particularly relevant to Webtoons, where vertical scrolling functions as a narrative device that structures readers’ temporal and emotional experience.

Despite the growing number of multimodal studies on Webtoons and digital discourse, several research gaps remain. Most existing studies focus on social issues, educational applications, or genre-based analysis, such as discrimination, bullying, or narrative structure (H et al., 2025; Hakim, 2025). Relatively little attention has been paid to artistic transformation through embodied movement, particularly in relation to dance. The transformation of Kang Seo-Eun from a technically rigid ballet practitioner into an emotionally expressive artist represents a unique multimodal phenomenon that warrants closer examination.

This transformation is conveyed primarily through visual representation rather than dialogue, making it an ideal object for multimodal analysis. Changes in posture, movement quality, facial expression, and spatial interaction reflect the protagonist's emotional development and evolving relationship with others. By examining ballet as a visual metaphor for emotional connection, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how human relationships are represented in digital visual narratives. Unlike studies that analyze love through psychological frameworks alone (Febriani & Dinanti, 2025), this research emphasizes the multimodal construction of emotion through visual grammar.

Accordingly, this research aims to analyze how visual signs in the Webtoon *If It's Okay With You, Teacher* are used to represent invisible emotions and fluid ballet movements within a static digital medium. Specifically, it examines how implied motion lines, body posture, facial expressions, gaze direction, and color composition function as semiotic resources in constructing narrative meaning. By applying Multimodal Discourse Analysis with a focus on visual grammar, this study seeks to demonstrate how static images can simulate movement and articulate abstract emotional experiences, thereby contributing to the broader field of multimodal discourse analysis and digital comic studies.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. The qualitative approach was chosen as it is uniquely suited for exploring and interpreting the complex construction of meaning within visual narratives, specifically how static images in a Webtoon can convey dynamic concepts like movement and emotion. This study specifically adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar because it provides a systematic "toolkit" for uncovering how visual elements, such as vectors, gaze, and composition, function as a language to construct social realities. This framework is particularly relevant for analyzing the Webtoon *If It's Okay With You, Teacher*, as it allows for an investigation into how the technical vocabulary of ballet choreography is visually manipulated to represent the intangible psychological process of falling in love.

The primary source of data for this research is the one-shot Webtoon titled *If It's Okay With You, Teacher* (original Korean title: 선생님만 괜찮다면 / *Seonsaengnim-man Gwaenchantamyeon*), published by Studio Paran on October 19, 2022. The research location is the digital platform Naver Webtoon, where the comic is officially distributed. The sample selection was conducted using a purposive sampling strategy, focusing specifically on ten key visual panels that illustrate the narrative progression of the protagonist, Kang Seo-Eun, and her partner, Shin Jae-Hwi. These specific panels were chosen because they contain rich multimodal data where the *Action Processes* of dance intersect with the *Reaction Processes* of intimacy, which are central to the study's objectives.

Data collection was performed using observational and documentation techniques. The researcher engaged in a close reading of the full narrative to understand the context, followed by the careful selection and high-resolution capturing of the specific panels. This aligns with the documentation method involving the archiving of visual texts to identify semiotic patterns. Following the collection, the data were analyzed using Kress and van Leeuwen's three-strata model: the representational level, the analysis examines narrative processes by identifying vectors and participants to determine who acts as the actor and who serves as the goal. At the interactive level, the analysis evaluates gaze, angle, and social distance to understand how the image positions the viewer emotionally. Finally, at the compositional level, the analysis assesses information value, salience, and framing to understand how the visual elements are arranged to prioritize specific romantic or narrative meanings.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study utilized theoretical triangulation. The interpretation of the visual data was cross-referenced with the established rules of visual grammar defined by Kress and van Leeuwen to ensure that the analysis of vectors and gaze remains consistent with theoretical norms. Furthermore, the study adhered to a systematic application of the analysis rubric to maintain objectivity. While the study does not employ statistical tests, the rigorous application of the MDA toolkit ensures that the findings are methodologically sound and critically engaged with the nuances of visual discourse. The focus remains on the authenticity of the interpretation and its alignment with the visual evidence present in the comic's panels, illustrating how the grammar of dance is translated into the grammar of love.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

This section presents the findings derived from the multimodal analysis of ten key visual panels in the webtoon *If It's Okay With You, Teacher*. The analysis demonstrates a systematic shift in visual grammar that corresponds to the protagonists' narrative progression from technical partners to romantic partners.

The data reveal a distinct evolution in the narrative processes and vectors employed to depict the characters' physical interactions. In the early panels, interactions are characterised by unidirectional action processes with fixed roles. However, as the narrative develops, the visual structure shifts definitively toward Bidirectional Transactional Processes. Vectors transition from rigid and linear to fluid and curved. These later images culminate in closed loops of mutual physical dependency in which the roles of actor and goal become interchangeable.

The analysis identified a consistent use of the offer gaze across all ten images. The characters look exclusively at one another rather than demanding the viewer's attention. Furthermore, the visual rhythm dynamically manipulates social distance and angle. The Webtoon alternates between long shots combined with low angles, which emphasise the technical grandeur, physical elevation, and power of the ballet lifts, and extreme close-ups at eye-level, which focus entirely on tactile intimacy, tears, and vulnerable facial expressions, thereby removing the performative aspect of the dance.

The most prominent compositional finding is the marked shift in modality and setting. Whereas the initial data point is situated within a naturalistic outdoor background, the subsequent nine panels systematically replace realistic physical spaces with a symbolic attribute: a glowing, blue-purple cosmic nebula. In the final images, the characters' silhouettes merge into a single visual unit, leaving no negative space between their bodies, and are centrally framed by symbolic cosmic wings.

3.2. Discussion

The visual narrative in the webtoon systematically reconstructs the concept of falling in love by transforming the visual grammar of ballet from a discipline of rigid mechanics into a language of spiritual intimacy. Through the representational metafunction, the early reliance on unidirectional action processes evolves into bidirectional transactional processes, thereby establishing mutual physical trust. This aligns with findings by Paola (2024), in which the interaction between people and actions in digital media is employed to construct specific ideational messages; in this case, the message is that genuine artistic expression requires the dissolution of the solitary self into a shared, interdependent unit.

The representation of intimacy is further constructed through a deliberate manipulation of the interpersonal metafunction. The consistent offer gaze creates a closed dyad that positions the reader as an observer of a private world. This visual strategy corresponds to the representation of consummate love observed in other animated narratives, in which visual framing is employed to depict the progression from distance to commitment (Febriani & Dinanti, 2025). Furthermore, the use of non-verbal cues, such as the layering of hands and the softening of facial expressions, functions as a counter-discourse to the often rigid or sexualised portrayals of bodies in media, offering instead a narrative of protective and consensual intimacy (Lityaningrum, 2021).

Crucially, the compositional decontextualisation of the setting operates as a significant narrative device. The systematic replacement of naturalistic reality with a cosmic nebula elevates the characters' connection beyond the mundane world. This shift in modality functions similarly to the coherence strategies identified in digital storytelling, in which symbolic visuals are integrated to guide the viewer's emotional response (Meier, 2022). In the final visual sequence, the composition frames the couple within symbolic wings, creating a maximally connected silhouette. This spatial arrangement resonates with the structural visualisation found in other Korean Webtoons, in which visual elements are employed to elevate characters from ordinary roles to archetypal or heroic statuses (Hidayat et al., 2025). By merging the physical discipline of dance with the metaphysical experience of love, the Webtoon visually concludes that the characters have achieved completion through absolute, transcendent union.



Figure 1. Kang Seo Eun and Shin Jae Hwi holding hands as they prepare for their ballet duet.

The opening panel of the analyzed sequence (Figure 1) depicts the protagonists, Kang Seo Eun and Shin Jae Hwi, situated in an outdoor rest area at night, capturing the genesis of their artistic and romantic partnership. In this scene, the characters adopt a preparatory stance characteristic of a *pas de deux*, with their bodies relaxed yet alert. The primary visual focal point is the vector formed by their joined hands. Within Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) framework of visual grammar, this vector functions not merely as a representation of a dance mechanic, but as a bidirectional transactional process. It signifies a mutual exchange of energy and the establishment of a physical connection necessary for partnering, visually translating the abstract concept of trust into a concrete line of action.

The visual atmosphere is constructed through a medium shot at eye level, which positions the viewer as an observer of an intimate negotiation rather than a participant. The characters engage in an offer gaze, looking exclusively at each other. This visual choice creates a closed dyad, reinforcing the theme of partnership and equality. By excluding the viewer from direct address, the image emphasizes that the trust being built is a private, fragile development between the two social actors. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the serene mountain background with the text bubbles expressing nervousness highlights the tension between professional competence and emotional vulnerability.

Ultimately, Figure 1 does not simply show two people standing together; it visualizes the transition from isolation to connection. The visual structure challenges the traditional perception of ballet as a rigid, solitary discipline. Instead, by centering the composition on the joined hands and mutual gaze (a technique of Connected Framing) the panel actively reframes the dance as a collaborative emotional exchange, thereby establishing that technical mastery in this narrative is inextricably linked to the ability to trust.



Figure 2. Shin Jae Hwi leads Kang Seo Eun in a dance under a starry night sky.

The visual progression in Figure 2 marks a radical departure from the realism of the previous scene, transitioning the narrative into a symbolic dimension. Here, the realistic mountain backdrop dissolves entirely, replaced by a deep blue, star-filled nebula. This shift in modality, from naturalistic to abstract, functions as a visual cue that the interaction has moved beyond the physical mechanics of the dance floor into the psychological realm of the characters (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). The removal of environmental context compels the viewer to focus exclusively on the interpersonal connection, suggesting that in this moment of synchronization, the external world ceases to exist for the protagonists.

Central to this panel is the specific transactional action process of the pressed palms. In the technical vocabulary of ballet, this gesture represents tactile cueing, a method where partners communicate momentum and direction through touch (Kant & Guest, 2025). However, visually, the vector formed by their joined hands creates a closed circuit of energy that signifies a profound surrender of control. Unlike a simple hand-hold, the pressing of palms implies an active, bidirectional exchange of force. While the text bubble establishes Shin Jae Hwi as the initiator asking Seo Eun to follow, the visual evidence of her reciprocating pressure redefines following not as a passive submission, but as an active and engaged choice to align her will with his. The intimacy of this exchange is heightened by the use of a close shot and connected framing. By cropping the image to focus tightly on their upper bodies and joined hands, the visual structure reduces the social distance to a personal, intimate zone.



Figure 3. Shin Jae Hwi performs a ballet lift with Kang Seo Eun.

The narrative trajectory ascends vertically in Figure 3, featuring a dramatic overhead lift known in ballet as a *presage*. In this scene, the visual composition is dominated by dynamic vectors that signal a shift from intimate connection to ecstatic liberation. Shin Jae Hwi acts as the porteur, his body forming a solid vertical pillar, while Kang Seo Eun extends her leg skyward, creating a sharp diagonal line that emphasizes the aesthetic quality of extension valued in classical ballet (Kant & Guest, 2025). Within the framework of ideational metafunction, this interaction is a unidirectional action process where the male protagonist (Actor) provides the physical force that allows the female protagonist (Goal) to achieve a state of suspension. However, the potential passivity of being lifted is negated by the transactional reaction process of their gaze; despite the physical exertion, their eyes remain locked, grounding the acrobatic feat in a continuous emotional exchange.

The visual impact of this moment is constructed through a Low Angle and a Long Shot, positioning the viewer as an audience member looking up at a spectacle of grandeur. This perspective transforms the couple into aspirational figures, creating a sense of awe. The Fantasy Modality of the starry nebula background further contextualizes the lift not as a physical exercise in a studio, but as a metaphorical flight through a cosmic expanse. This shift in setting reinforces the discourse that their relationship has transported them beyond the mundane limitations of reality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

Compositionally, Figure 3 utilizes vertical polarization to map the structure of their relationship onto the image space. Jae Hwi, positioned at the bottom, represents the Real, which is the earthly foundation and unwavering support. Seo Eun, occupying the upper section, represents the Ideal, such as the dream, the flight, and the aspiration. This visual hierarchy articulates a specific ideology regarding romantic partnership: that the real support of one partner is the necessary condition for the Ideal freedom of the other. Thus, the image visually defines love as an empowering force, suggesting that the circumstance of being supported allows the individual to reach heights that would be impossible to achieve in isolation.



Figure 4. Close-up frames of Shin Jae Hwi and Kang Seo Eun during performance.

The narrative rhythm decelerates in Figure 4, shifting from the kinetic energy of the lift to a moment of profound psychological interiority. In this sequence, the visual focus narrows into a series of extreme close-ups, isolating the faces of Kang Seo Eun and Shin Jae Hwi as sweats stream down their cheeks. This visual choice signifies a departure from the *danse d'école* (technical dance) to the mime tradition of ballet, where facial expression serves as the primary vehicle for narrative communication (Kant & Guest, 2025). The high sensory modality of the scene, emphasized by the persistent blue cosmic background, strips away the physical context of the studio, suggesting that this emotional release is occurring in the same transcendent space as the physical dance.

From an ideational perspective, the scene represents a radical shift from action processes to reaction processes. There are no transactional vectors of limbs connecting the characters here; instead, the primary vectors are the downward flow of sweats and the inward gaze. This absence of physical interaction highlights that the realization of consummate love is, initially, a deeply personal and internal event. The accompanying text overlays, describing feelings of a heart fluttering and bursting, function as projective processes that anchor the visual ambiguity of the tears, confirming them as symptoms of overwhelming affection rather than distress. As observed in multimodal analyses of digital narratives, such textual anchors are crucial for guiding the viewer's interpretation of ambiguous visual cues (Stewart, 2024).

The interpersonal construction of Figure 4 utilizes extreme close-ups to dismantle the social distance between the subject and the viewer. By filling the frame with the characters' vulnerable expressions, the image forces the audience into a position of radical empathy. The indirect offer gaze (looking inward or off-frame) positions the viewer as a witness to a private epiphany. Compositionally, the use of disconnected framing (split panels) is syntactically significant; it visually articulates that while the emotional experience is mutual, the moment of realization is experienced individually. The separate frames underscore the autonomy of each character's emotional awakening before their inevitable reunion.



Figure 5. Shin Jae Hwi holds Kang Seo Eun's hand and waist while leading her into a dance.

The narrative reaches a point of synthesis in Figure 5, visualizing the resolution of the protagonist's internal conflict through the romantic dip. In ballet terminology, this pose is a variation of a *cambré* or a fish dive, where the ballerina arcs her body backward, relying entirely on her partner's support (Kant & Guest, 2025). Visually, this panel marks a significant departure from the linear vectors of the earlier lift. Instead, the composition is dominated by fluid and curved vectors that flow downward and outward, signifying a softening of the rigid discipline that previously defined Kang Seo Eun's character. The Primary Vector of the dip functions as a semiotic realization of surrender; the physical act of falling backward serves as a direct visual metaphor for the psychological act of falling in love.

From an ideational perspective, the interaction is characterized by a bidirectional transactional process that creates a perfect equilibrium between agency and reception. The male protagonist acts as the stable fulcrum (Actor), while the female protagonist (Actor) actively extends her arm and leans into the void (Goal). This visual grammar validates the research hypothesis that love, in this narrative, is not about the loss of self, but about the harmonious integration of two wills. The reaction process of their closed-loop gaze ensures that the physical risk of the dip is mitigated by emotional assurance, transforming a moment of potential instability into one of absolute trust.

Interpersonally, the image constructs an idealized modality through the use of the infinite nebula background. By enveloping the couple in starlight, the visual narrative elevates the moment from a physical event in a studio to a spiritual union in the cosmos (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). The medium close shot balances the intimacy of the near-kiss with the structural beauty of their intertwined bodies, positioning the viewer as a voyeur to a moment of perfection. Compositionally, the maximum connectedness of the framing is critical; the two figures are no longer visually distinct entities but are fused into a dynamic triangle. This unity suggests that the technical skill of the dance and the emotional truth of the romance have finally merged, offering a visual definition of consummate love as a state where vulnerability is the highest form of strength (Febriani & Dinanti, 2025).



Figure 6. Shin Jae Hwi holds Kang Seo Eun's waist as they perform a synchronized dance move.

The visual narrative reaches a crescendo of intimacy in Figure 6, the protagonists lock into a passionate embrace, creating a visual synthesis of the technical and the emotional. The background persists as a deep galaxy or nebula, a High Modality setting that functions semiotically to strip away the mundane context of the rehearsal room. By placing the couple against the infinite, the image decontextualizes their relationship, framing their union not as a social event but as a cosmic phenomenon that transcends earthly boundaries (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

From an ideational perspective, this image represents the definitive shift to a bidirectional transactional process. Unlike earlier images where the vectors were unidirectional (lifting, leading), here the vectors form a closed circuit of mutual dependency. Shin Jae Hwi anchors the pose by securing Kang Seo Eun's waist, a gesture rooted in the stability of ballet partnering, while she actively encircles his shoulder. Crucially, her left arm remains raised in a classical *port de bras* extension. This specific visual detail is significant; it suggests that even in a moment of overwhelming passion, the identity of the dancer is not lost but is instead elevated (Kant & Guest, 2025). The romance does not negate the art; rather, the art becomes the vessel for the romance.

Interpersonally, the visual structure utilizes a medium shot at eye level to balance physical proximity with emotional clarity. The flushed expressions of the characters serve as biological signifiers of their internal state, marking the transition from the performance of the dance to the "reality" of their feelings. The connected framing is absolute in this composition; the bodies are fused into a single visual unit, effectively isolating them from the viewer and the outside world. This visual grammar actively constructs a discourse of equality and mutual dependency, arguing that the consummate love sought by the protagonist is achieved only when the distinction between the supporter and the supported dissolves into a singular, unified force.



Figure 7. The male student holds the female student's face while they gaze at each other.

The narrative pacing undergoes a significant deceleration in Figure 7, acting as a visual caesura that shifts the focus from kinetic virtuosity to haptic intimacy. In this close-up panel, the choreography performed here by students re-enacting Kang Seo Eun's composition, distills the protagonists' relationship into a single gesture of mime. In the semiotic tradition of ballet, where hand gestures function as a lexicon for specific emotions, the placement of the male dancer's hand on the female dancer's cheek serves as a universal signifier of protection and affection (Kant & Guest, 2025). Despite the change in social actors, the visual continuity is maintained through the Cosmic Setting, suggesting that the choreography has successfully immortalized the protagonists' private feelings into a transcendent artistic form.

From an ideational perspective, the interaction is defined by a nuanced transactional action process. The primary vector is formed by the man's hand reaching out, a unidirectional offer of comfort. However, the visual narrative complicates this through the secondary vector of the woman's hand layering over his. This act of reciprocity transforms the gesture from a simple touch into a bidirectional exchange of consent and acknowledgment. Within Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) framework, this layering of hands constructs a visual argument that love is not merely about being held (passive), but about accepting and anchoring that hold (active). The reactionary process of their mutual gaze reinforces this feedback loop, excluding the audience to prioritize the internal emotional circuit of the dancers.

Interpersonally, the image utilizes a close-up social distance to force the viewer into the intimate zone of the performance. By filling the frame with the facial expressions and the tactile point of contact, the visual grammar strips away the spectacle of the stage, leaving only the high detail modality of human connection. The "Offer" gaze creates a sense of voyeurism, positioning the viewer as a witness to a confession that is paradoxically public (performed on stage) yet deeply private (emotional truth). Compositionally, the central information value places the joined hands at the heart of the image, while the connected framing links the two distinct figures into a single emotional unit.

Ultimately, Figure 7 articulates a discourse on the power of softness. In a genre often defined by athletic feats and grand leaps, this visual choice posits that tenderness is as powerful as passion. By elevating a subtle, non-verbal interaction to the focal point of the choreography, the Webtoon challenges the hierarchy of movement, suggesting that the quiet moments of recognition are the true foundation of the consummate love depicted in the narrative (Febriani & Dinanti, 2025). The cosmic background elevates this tactile communication, framing the

gentle touch not just as a part of the dance, but as a sacred act that resonates with the universal experience of being known and protected.



Figure 8. A male student and a female student show the performance under a starlit sky setting.

In Figure 8, the choreography, performed here by students embodying Kang Seo Eun's artistic vision, showcases a dynamic grand battement or high développ  . The image is dominated by the sharp verticality of the female dancer's extended leg, creating a striking line of action that pierces the upper frame. Within the Cosmic Setting, this technical feat is not merely an athletic display but a visual metaphor for the aspiration inherent in the protagonists' journey.

From an ideational perspective, the composition relies on a contrast between dynamic and static action processes. The female dancer functions as the dynamic force (Actor), her primary vector shooting upwards to symbolize freedom and reach. Conversely, the male partner performs the static action of support (Actor), acting as the grounding force. Crucially, the Secondary Vector formed by his gaze, focused intently on her movement, adds a layer of reactional meaning. It signifies that his role is not just to hold weight, but to monitor and safeguard her performance. This visual arrangement constructs a specific discourse on partnership: that individual brilliance (the high extension) is often sustained by the unseen, steady attention of a partner (Kant & Guest, 2025).

Interpersonally, the image constructs a relationship of admiration between the viewer and the subject through the use of a Low Angle and a Long Shot. By positioning the point of view below the dancers, the visual grammar glorifies the female figure, rendering her powerful and almost goddess-like in her extension. This challenges traditional representations of the frail ballerina; instead, she is depicted as a pillar of strength. The minimalist modality, which focuses on the silhouette and line rather than facial nuance, directs the viewer's attention to the purity of the form. It argues that the perfection of the relationship is visible in the geometry of their bodies.

Compositionally, Figure 8 provides a textbook example of the ideal/real structure described by Kress and van Leeuwen (2020). The male partner, anchored at the bottom, represents the real, which means the necessary, earthly foundation of discipline and support. The female partner's leg, reaching into the top section, represents the Ideal, which means the artistic goal and the state of perfection. The connected framing at the waist serves as the hinge between these two zones, visually articulating the ideology that the Ideal of artistic freedom is only attainable through the real security of a trusted partner. Thus, the image confirms that the protagonists' love has translated into a legacy of technical flawlessness.



Figure 9. A male student supports a female student in a dynamic dance pose.

The metaphor of flight reaches its visual apex in Figure 9, representing the climax of freedom within the narrative sequence. In this panel, the choreography performed by students re-enacting the protagonists' original duet, demonstrates a spectacular *presage* lift. The female dancer is held high above her partner's head, her arms spread wide in a gesture of absolute release. By depicting this moment through the bodies of students, the visual narrative suggests that Kang Seo Eun's internal emotional journey has been successfully translated into a transferable artistic form; the private feeling of falling in love has become a public text of liberation. The persistent cosmic setting reinforces this, framing the lift not as a mere athletic feat, but as a mythical ascent through a nebula, enhancing the sensory modality of weightlessness (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

Ideationally, the image is defined by a complex interplay of Action and Reaction processes. The male dancer functions as the actor performing the lift, providing the kinetic force required to conquer gravity. The female dancer, serving as the goal of the lift, simultaneously acts as an actor through her posture; her open arms and upward stretch function as movement indicators that signify active flight rather than passive suspension. This transactional process nuances the discourse of independence. It visualizes the paradox that true autonomy (the feeling of flying) is often achieved through interdependence (being lifted). The Secondary Vector of the male partner's gaze, looking up in awe, redefines his role from a mere support structure to a witness of her transformation (Kant & Guest, 2025).

Interpersonally, the visual grammar utilizes a dramatic low angle to position the viewer in a state of wonder. Looking up at the floating figure, the audience is compelled to view the woman as an aspirational entity. The long shot captures the full verticality of the composition, emphasizing the distance between the earth (the man's feet) and the sky (the woman's hands).

Compositionally, Figure 9 adheres to the Top/Bottom information structure, distinguishing the ideal from the real. The bottom zone, occupied by the male partner, represents the Real, which means the necessary physical labor and trust that underpins the relationship. The top zone, occupied by the female partner, represents the Ideal, which means the dream of emotional freedom. The connected framing created by his hands supporting her waist ensures that these two zones remain united. Thus, the image argues that the wings of love are not solitary, but are constructed through the trusted hands of a partner (Febriani & Dinanti, 2025).



Figure 10. A male student and a female student show the performance under a starlit sky setting.

The visual narrative concludes with Figure 10, an image that acts as the visual apotheosis of the protagonists' journey. In this final panel, the choreography of the dance dissolves entirely into a protective embrace. The setting shifts once more, evolving from the blue nebula of the earlier scenes to a warm, purple-pink cosmic sky featuring the symbolic shape of a pair of wings. This Symbolic Attribute is critical; it suggests that the consummate love achieved by the characters is not merely emotional but transcendent. By framing the couple within these wings, the visual narrative shifts the discourse from a realistic romance to a spiritual salvation, implying that their union has granted them the capacity for flight without the physical exertion of the dance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

From an ideational perspective, the interaction is defined by a bidirectional transactional process that signifies the complete merger of identities. Shin Jae-Hwi functions as the actor performing the action of protection (hugging tightly), while Kang Seo-Eun functions simultaneously as an actor (leaning totally) and a goal (being held). The rigidity of the teacher-student dynamic is replaced by a fluid single action-reaction unit. The inclusion of projective processes via text bubbles serves to verbalize the internal state that the visual already confirms: a sense of total safety and belonging. This alignment of verbal and visual modes creates a multimodal coherence that solidifies the narrative resolution (Meier, 2022).

Interpersonally, the image employs a Soft Modality to construct a romantic haze, idealizing the moment and positioning the viewer as a witness to a happy ending. The Long Shot is structurally necessary to encompass the wings, placing the couple in a context that is larger than life. Despite the distance, the Eye-level angle maintains an intimate connection, inviting the viewer to appreciate the serenity of their surrender.

Compositionally, Figure 10 utilizes central information value to place the couple at the heart of the cosmic design. The wings serve as a natural frame, locking the figures together and creating a silhouette of Maximum Connectedness. This visual arrangement confirms that the struggle for connection is over. By combining the grounding of the protective hug with the flight of the wings, the image offers a final visual definition of love: it is a shelter that simultaneously offers freedom (Febriani & Dinanti, 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the multimodal construction of meaning in the one-shot webtoon *If It's Okay With You, Teacher* (Studio Paran, 2022) using Multimodal Discourse Analysis with a focus on Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar. The findings indicate that the Webtoon effectively utilizes visual semiotic resources to represent two inherently abstract dimensions: the fluidity of ballet movement and the emotional complexity of first love. Through narrative processes such as action and reactional processes, the Webtoon simulates bodily motion and

emotional response within a static visual medium, allowing readers to perceive movement and affect beyond verbal narration.

At the representational level, implied vectors, body posture, and sequential panel arrangement successfully construct the illusion of continuous ballet motion, while facial expressions and gaze patterns convey the protagonist's internal emotional transformation. Interactive meanings are achieved through intimate visual distance, frontal perspectives, and selective close-ups, positioning readers as empathetic observers of Kang Seo-Eun's journey from technical rigidity to expressive artistry. Compositional strategies, including vertical spacing, panel isolation, and controlled color transitions, further regulate narrative rhythm and emotional intensity, demonstrating how the vertical-scrolling format itself functions as a semiotic resource.

Overall, this research confirms that visual grammar provides a robust framework for examining how digital comics construct meaning through visual modes. By foregrounding dance as a visual metaphor for emotional growth and interpersonal connection, this study contributes to multimodal discourse research by extending analysis into the representation of embodied artistic expression in Webtoons.

Based on these findings, future research is encouraged to explore comparative analyses of Webtoons featuring performative arts or to incorporate audience reception studies to examine how readers interpret visualized movement and emotion. Practically, this study may inform Webtoon creators and visual communication educators about effective strategies for conveying abstract emotions and dynamic actions through static digital imagery, thereby enhancing multimodal storytelling in digital media.

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