

FORENSIC STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF UNNES STUDENT'S SUICIDE NOTE

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Abstract

Abstract: Suicide notes are powerful pieces of evidence in suicide cases that left by individuals who commit suicide or who intend to commit suicide as messages, with the purpose is to voicing the victims' feelings that remain unknown by people when they are alive. This study investigates the linguistic features contained in the suicide note written by UNNES student by using descriptive-qualitative as the research method and applying Prokofyeva's theory of suicide notes linguistic features. The suicide note is available and can be accessed online. This study aims to analyze the forensic stylistic approach towards suicide notes by showing the characteristics of linguistic features and interpreting the messages delivered by the victims on suicide notes. The researchers classified and described the data in five distinguished characteristics of linguistic features found in the suicide note; clear reasoning, expressing emotions, text structure, grammar, and punctuation. The findings revealed that all the features are present in the suicide note, yet the researchers found that there are different tenses used in the suicide note. The results found only ellipsis in the victim's suicide note. The data findings in this research may assist future research regarding the study of forensic stylistics, specifically in investigating suicide notes.

Keywords: Stylistics, Forensic Stylistics, Suicide Note, Linguistic Features, Characteristics

INTRODUCTION

The ability to express ideas, feelings, and thoughts precisely and subtly through language makes it a powerful tool. However, language use is more than just a means of communication; it also serves as a reflection of our distinct personalities, societal expectations, and cultural influences. The study of how language choices may shape, communicate, and even enhance meaning is the focus of stylistics, a branch of linguistic research that focuses on the intricate relationship that exists between language and meaning. Wales (2011: 397) defines style as a person's distinctive writing or speaking way.

In his book, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, Geoffrey Leech, a well-known linguist, defines stylistics as "the study of style in language, the study of the choices which speakers and writers make in selecting words and phrases, sentence structures, and language features". The major goal of stylistics is to help us comprehend the author's objective in the way that the information has been conveyed by the author or writer. The study of grammar, lexis, semantics, phonological features, and discursive devices are all covered by stylistics [Trask RL, Peter Stockwell (2007), & Simpson, Paul (2004)]. Additionally, stylistics is a flexible field that may be used to examine different textual artifacts and provide insight into language subtleties and their effects. While stylistic analysis is frequently connected to literature, it may also be applied to unconventional and even sensitive items like suicide notes, fraud documents, legal documents, and more.

One attentive and important application is the stylistic examination of suicide notes. To understand the emotional state, objectives, and motives of the people who wrote these letters, researchers and mental health practitioners may use stylistics. It is possible to learn more about the author's mind by looking at language trends, tone, and word selection. According to Thomas Bloor, "suicide notes are a particularly interesting chance to examine how language reflects and conveys strong feelings, despair, and pain. A glimpse into the minds of persons who are struggling can be provided through stylistic analysis, which might result in more effective interventions and support."

This research aims to analyze a suicide note from the Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) student suicide case that can be found in Suara Merdeka Sport news article posted on October 11th, 2023. The suicide case that occurred at a mall in Semarang revealed that it was a student from Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES). The victim is suspected of committing suicide, on Tuesday, October 10th, 2023 at 17.00 WIB, allegedly under a lot of pressure from his mother. The identity of the victim is NJW, (20) resident of Candi Penataran, Kalipancur Village, Ngaliyan, Semarang City. Before ending her life, the victim wrote a letter of apology to her mother. The contents of the apology letter stated that the victim was no longer strong or unable to follow her mother's wishes. Finally, the victim took a shortcut, allegedly jumping from Paragon Mall on Pemuda Semarang Street. The researchers use this suicide note as their research subject because they are interested in examining the linguistic characteristics of an authentic suicide note. This case gained attention at the time this research was conducted and was widely discussed by Indonesian society.

By using Prokofyeva theory, the researchers in this study concentrate on identifying the linguistic features found in the suicide note. In this context, the term "suicide" does not apply to perpetrators, those who engage in destructive, unlawful, or immoral behavior that has the potential to cause the death of others, but rather to the deliberate act of causing one's death. These letters were written before they passed away and they contain words that helped them pass away. By examining the language traits employed and the victim's motives, last wishes, or reasons for taking their own life, this study aims to shed the spotlight on the topic of forensic stylistics.

REVIEW LITERATURE

a. Forensic Stylistics

The term Forensic Stylistics, also known as Forensic Linguistics was officially coined in 1968 by Jan Svartvik, a renowned linguistics professor. Svartvik's seminal examination of remarks made by Timothy John Evans was the first documented usage of this term in the field. Forensic stylistics is frequently presented simply in terms of stylistic analysis (Crystal 1987:69), and the subject is quickly developing including a variety of different forms of specialized language analyses that serve as the foundation for expert opinion testifying in civil and criminal actions. This interdisciplinary field applies linguistic knowledge to several aspects of the forensic setting, including law, language, criminal investigation, trial proceedings, and judicial procedures. Olsson (2008) posits, as cited in Umiyati (2020), that forensic linguistics pertains to the field of investigative linguistics. In other words, its primary objective is to provide investigators with techniques for analyzing texts based on their specific types, rather than supplying the court with scientifically examined evidence. The discussion of text types in forensic linguistics pertains to many contextual situations, each of which gives rise to one or more distinct text types.

When we refer to text types in forensic stylistics, we are referring to a variety of situations, each of which generates one or more text types. Emergency calls, ransom demands and other threat communications, suicide letters, final death row statements, and confessions and denials by public figures are among the types of forensic texts examined (Olsson, 2008). For this study, the author wants to take a close look at a type of writing called "suicide notes." It's important to note that the idea of suicide notes is also known as "suicide letters." For consistency's sake, we will only use the terms "suicide notes" or "genuine suicide notes" thereafter. From the perspective of forensic linguistics, suicide notes serve as intriguing examples of written discourse. The linguistic patterns employed by individuals experiencing suicidal ideation have garnered significant attention from scholars in the field of linguistics. Consequently, several scholarly endeavors have been devoted to the examination and interpretation of suicide notes.

Suicide Notes

Individuals who commit suicide or who have suicidal thoughts often leave notes for loved ones before taking their own lives (Shapero, 2011). The messages left by victims may be in the form of written or otherwise recorded forms, such as notes, letters, notebooks, diaries, or

transcribed audio cassettes. These types of recorded forms may also include audio tapes. According to Rany et al.'s (2015) research, between 25 and 30 percent of the suicide notes that were left behind as pieces of evidence were written down. Additionally, the contents of a suicide note can be a complaint or a reason regarding why the subject committed suicide. The victim may either be appealing to someone to do anything or blaming someone for upsetting their life, which ultimately drives them to take their own life. Either way, the victim may be making a complaint. According to Olsson (2004), the majority of suicide notes contain a statement that refers to the act of committing suicide by oneself. The individual who writes a note may be making an effort to communicate feelings that the person did not have the opportunity to express while they were still living. Banikalef (2021) stated that how speakers of society carry out various speech functions by utilizing particular linguistic expressions is governed by the linguistic and social norms of that society. Speakers employ several strategies to convey the meanings of the messages they aim to convey (Hassouneh and Zibin. 2021).

Accordingly, in suicide notes, Chaski (2012) proposes six elements of texts that can be found in them, which are apology, love, anger, complaint, business, and trauma. Based on the work of Prokofyeva (2013), she suggests that there are five characteristic features of genuine suicide notes, namely clear reasoning, expressing emotions, text structure, grammar, and punctuation. Moreover, she outlined the purpose of the original suicide note as perhaps, but not limited to, (1) a desire to give a reason for their suicide. (2) to express the last wish of the author/victim, or (3) to say their final farewell to the addressees of the note.

b. Previously Related Studies

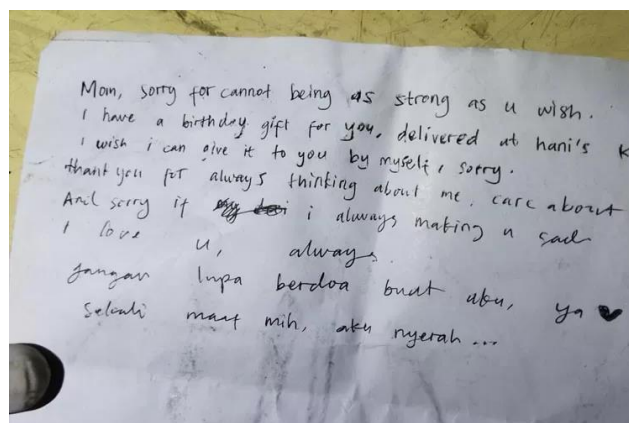
Previous research has been conducted on several topics, including the language study of suicide notes. Prokofyeva (2013), for example, observed the linguistic differences and similarities found in suicide notes and suicide posts with her analysis, and she concluded that if more characteristics of the original suicide notes are found in suicide posts, then there is a possibility that the suicide posts were written by a potential victim and then developed into a suicide note. This leads one to believe that the person who wrote the note will, at some point in the future, take their own life. Another study, which was carried out by Maharani et al. (2022) in their research "The Qualities of Forensic Stylistics Enfolded in Suicide Notes," evaluated the characteristic linguistic aspects of suicide notes written by eleven well-known men. The findings of the analysis revealed that every linguistic item was included in each suicide note quite effectively.

Previous studies on the linguistic analysis of suicide notes have typically consisted of analyzing many suicide notes from previously resolved cases. However, the focus of this research is on the linguistic characteristics of the suicide notes that were left behind by a student at the Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) who recently took her own life. One of the merits of this research is that it focuses on a relatively recent example of suicide. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the study of the relationship between suicide notes and forensic stylistics.

METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. This study aims to analyze the forensic stylistic approach towards suicide notes by showing the characteristics of linguistic features and interpreting the messages delivered by the victims on suicide notes. The researchers took several steps to conduct the research. First, the data was taken from <https://sport.suaramerdeka.com/news/97610462892/pelaku-bunuh-diri-di-mall-semarang-ternyata-mahasiswa-unnes-tulis-permintaan-maaf-ini-identitasnya> about suicide at the Semarang Mall turned out to be a Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) student on October 11th, 2023. The researchers collected documentation of suicide notes by the victim. Second, the data was analyzed by using Prokofyeva's (2013) theory about characteristic and language features in suicide notes, which are clear reasoning; expressing emotion; text structure; grammar; and punctuation. Third is making the conclusions based on the findings of the analyzed data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION



Picture 1.1 Suicide Note from UNNES Student

1. Clear Reasoning

Clear reasoning refers to the relation between the reason for suicide and the message delivered on the suicide notes. Prokofyeva (2013) categorizes clear reasoning as divided into three categories, they are disease, offense, and blame in hopelessness. She also explained that clear reasoning is found because it is represented by the answer to the question "Why?". And the subordinate conjunction 'because' will reflect the reason. Based on suicide notes by a UNNES student with her initial name NJW, this is categorized as despair, which can be seen in 'Mom, sorry for not being as strong as you wish' and 'once again sorry mom, i give up'. Despair happens when someone feels an emotional feeling of hopelessness. NJW, as the author and victim, may feel guilty about the action or problems she did before. Meanwhile, she thanked her mom as her supporter and also one of the reasons of her suicide before she committed to end her life. The clause 'I give up' explains everything that she thought that she can not live in general and ending her life is the only solution.

2. Expressing Emotions

Examining the emotions expressed by the author of the suicide note within the note itself is another way to determine whether or not the note is authentic. The suicide notes express several emotions, including fear of living, relief, hopelessness, and the absence of doubt (Prokofyeva, 2013). The absence of doubt is one of the emotions shown in this suicide note. Heidegger, in Fata et al. (2021), stated that he had met someone who felt safe in front of death; the person faced death with peace of mind rather than with fear. The authenticity of a suicide note can be established by the clear display of intense emotions conveyed by the author. For instance, "Jangan lupa berdoa buat aku ya (don't forget to pray for me, okay)" in the seventh line This example demonstrates the author's lack of fear when she decided to end her life by requesting her mother's prayers. The use of a black heart emoji, which is occasionally indicative of intense love as well as death, in the seventh line suggests that the writer's love for her mother is strong, comparable to her tendency towards committing suicide.

Regarding the suicide note, the predominant emotion is a sense of belonging that leads to an "offense" against the world or an existence that has become "tiresome" (Prokofyeva, 2013). This sentiment is expressed in the first line of the note, "Sekali lagi maaf mih, aku yeah..." (once again, sorry, Mom, I give up...), in which the victim implies that she is tired of life and is going to set herself free from her miseries and attempt a new way of living.

Moreover, it is evident that the victim accepts responsibility for their decision to end their own lives (Prokofeva, 2013). Numerous expressions of regret can be found on this suicide note (#1: "Mom, I'm sorry for not being as strong as you wish"; #5: "And I'm sorry for always making you sad"; #8 "*Sekali lagi maaf mih, aku nyerah...*" (once again, sorry, Mom, I give up...)). The author blames herself for what is occurring, and she apologizes to their family and friends for being the cause of her suffering. However, authors who fall into this category typically explain that they believe they have no other option and that the unfavorable decision was made for various reasons. This is a common theme among authors in this category.

3. Text Structure

A suicide note, like any other written material, has a pattern or structure that is comparable to another suicide note. (Prokofyeva, 2013) state that habitually, people think about their willingness to commit suicide for a long time before making the ultimate decision, so that when they choose to do it, they already settle the words that need to be written in the note. According to Sudjana and Fitri (2013), victims used to address their suicide notes for a variety of reasons. The note address is usually the first line of the suicide note. In the suicide note written by NJW, the victim addressed the note to her mother explicitly in the first line.

‘Mom, sorry for cannot being as strong as u wish’

The word ‘Mom’ is the very first word written in the suicide note, thus people who read the note can understand that the note is precisely addressed to her mother. The line ‘sorry for cannot being as strong as u wish’ is delivered as an apology which becomes the introduction that leads the messages in the note. This line is followed by another apology that emphasizes the victim's absence in the near future.

‘I have a birthday gift for you, delivered at Hani’s kost.

I wish I can give it to you by myself, sorry.’

Ioannou and Debowska (2014) claim that victims adopt the stereotype of suicide motive as their explanation, which is typically communicated through negative emotion. However, in the NJW’s suicide note, the victim delivered some negative emotions without revealing the suicide motives or explaining what happened in her life that triggered her due to her decision. The culmination of the note wrapped in the statement of thanks and apology, added with the victim’s declaration of love to her mother.

‘Thank you for always thinking about me, care about me.

And sorry if I always making u sad.

I love u, always.’

The conclusion structure of the note includes the victim’s, NJW's final request and last apology in the note, also followed by her closing statement that shows her willingness to her final decision is constant.

‘Jangan lupa berdoa buat aku, ya

(Don’t forget to pray for me, okay)

Sekali lagi maaf mih, aku nyerah.’

(Once again sorry Mom, I give up)

From the closing statements, it can be known that NJW’s final request is that she wants her mother to pray for her after her death. The last line ‘Once again sorry Mom, I give up....’ accentuates her final decision and her constant apology in the note implies that she’s not turning back from the decision she made.

4. Grammar

There are several characteristics of grammar in suicide notes. According to Galasinki (2017), suicide notes are often more directed towards the past, which attracts victims to write about situations from the present to the past. Usually, there are not many statements that show the situation from present to the future. To conclude, the use of past tense is commonly occurs in suicide notes than other tenses (Prokopyeva, 2013). Hence, various forms of tenses are found in the data.

Mom, sorry for cannot being as strong as you wish. (Present Participle)

I have a birthday gift for you, delivered at hani's kost. (Simple Present)

I wish I can give it to you by myself, sorry. (Conditional: error)

thank you for always thinking about me, care about me. (Present tense)

And sorry if I always making you sad. (Present tense: error)

I love you, always. (Simple Present)

Don't forget to pray for me, ya (Imperative)

Once again sorry mih (mom), i give up... (Simple Present)

The victim, NJW tends to use grammar present tense in her suicide note, yet she actually refers to the past until now, which means there are some grammar errors that occur in her writing. NJW wrote "I wish I can give it to you" in which the word 'wish' is usually paired with a past form verb to express that the situation in the present is expected to be different. In this case, the word 'could' is the correct form instead of 'can'. The simple present tense in "I love you, always" and "I have a birthday gift for you" indicate a fact, that NJW continually loves her mother as she states her gratitude and regret to her mother in "thank you for always thinking about me, care about me" and "sorry for cannot being as strong as you wish" which also show the present situation. Moreover, "sorry if I always making you sad" is grammatically incorrect. Either to be 'am' should be inserted after subject 'I' to create present continuous tense or suffix '-ing' in the word 'making' should be removed to create simple present tense. Even so, the statement is still showing the victim's regret and apology toward her mother, additionally in "Mom, sorry for cannot being as strong as you wish."

5. Punctuation

The most crucial aspect of examining a suicide note is the punctuation. According to Schoene and Dethlef (2016), a person's punctuation style is influenced by their background, education, social standing, and family situation. Punctuation can therefore be used to convey emotion or reveal the victim's state.

Additionally, punctuation helps clarify a sentence's meaning. 'Meaningful' punctuation refers to a few common patterns seen in suicide notes. Punctuation, according to Eber-Schmid (2017), helps clear up misunderstandings and convey the victim's feelings in a text. Prokofyeva (2013) provided the following instances of common punctuation patterns seen in suicide notes:

- "--" (double-dash) is a symbol that can be used in place of a comma, a dash, or a period.
- "..." (three or more periods after a sentence or phrase) is a common way to convey the impression of an open-ended or continuing statement. This indication raises the possibility that what was said is not the end.
- "!!!" (three, occasionally one, exclamation marks): they are used to emphasize a word or phrase's significance.

Therefore, exclamation points, semicolons, apostrophes, left and right brackets, asterisks, plus signs, emotions, ellipses, and question marks are common punctuation types in suicide notes (Eber-Schmid, 2017).

From the analysis of the suicide notes, only an ellipsis in the victim's statement was discovered. "*Sekali lagi maaf mih, aku nyerah...*" The ellipsis at the end of a sentence denotes an unfinished thought or an incomplete statement that accomplishes the purpose for which it was meant.

CONCLUSION

Suicide notes generally contain what the writer is thinking. Depending on the author, the style and word choice usually vary from note to note. In the field of forensic stylistics, suicide notes are being examined in order to understand the emotional state, objectives, and motives of the people who wrote them. Using Prokofyeva's theory, the researchers found all the characteristics and language features in a student of UNNES suicide notes, there are clear reasoning, expressing emotions, text structure, grammar, and punctuation. Clear reasoning found in the note is categorized as despair as the victim shows her guilty and emotional feelings of hopelessness in the note. In expressing emotions, the absence of doubt is one of the emotions shown in this suicide note. Numerous expressions of regret can be clearly seen. The victim blames herself and keeps apologizing to her mother. Text structure also occurs in this suicide note, which begins with addressing people in the first line and closes with the victim's final request and apology towards her mother showing willingness to her final decision. Then, unlike Prokofyeva's conclusion, different tenses were found in analyzing grammar. Generally, the tenses used in suicide notes are past tense, but the researchers found other tenses such as present tense, conditional, and imperative sentences. Lastly, only an ellipsis is found in the victim's suicide note, which denotes an unfinished thought or an incomplete statement that accomplishes the purpose for which it was meant. However, by this analysis, it is obviously shown that the suicide note was genuinely written by the victim.

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