Article

Experiences Around the Clauses: A Transitivity Analysis of Four Famous People's Suicide Notes

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A B S T R A C T

Four suicide notes written by three famous people, Jiah Khan, Kevin Carter, and Virginia Woolf, were analyzed in this study. Systemic Functional Linguistics theory especially about transitivity proposed by Halliday is used to see the ideational meaning of all four suicide notes by identifying the elements of the clauses. This study was conducted with a qualitative method assisted by a descriptive statistical method to see the spread and functions of the elements of transitivity in the suicide notes. To analyze the text based on the theory of transitivity, the text is divided into clauses based on the type of process, then each element of the existing process, participant, and circumstantial element is calculated. The results show that out of 170 total processes found, the material process (42.94%) is the most dominant process, followed by the mental process (28.82%), the relational process (19.41%), the verbal process (5.29%), the behavioral process (2.94%), and the existential process (0.59%). Just like the process type, from the two types of participants (who are directly involved and obliquely involved) that exist, actor (22.88%) and scope (15.36%) which are the participants of the material process are the most dominant participants. While the existent (0.31%) which is the participant of the existential process, has the lowest occurrence frequency. For the circumstantial element, location which consists of place and time is the most dominant circumstantial element. The location accounts for 44% of the circumstantial elements in all four suicide notes. Furthermore, Jiah Khan's suicide note with the material process as the most dominant process describes the unpleasant behavior she experienced, which then leads to betrayal, sacrifice, self-destruction, loss, and loneliness. Whereas Kevin Carter's suicide note with the relational process of attributive as the most dominant process describes regret, pressure, and despair. Then both Virginia Woolf's suicide notes show how she blamed herself for what happened although it has different dominant processes between the first suicide note and the second suicide note.

INTRODUCTION

Not only as an oral and written communication tool, language also functions as an emotional release and a tool for the human to express themselves as members of society and parts of culture. Usually, there are people who prefer to use written language rather than spoken language to say what is left unsaid. Some people believe that sometimes writing is more than just speaking. Unfortunately, people who used to keep silent on the things they are facing are feared to get negative effects on themselves. The worst possibility is, they might not have friends to talk to, or even be isolated from their surroundings which could lead someone to commit suicide.

The suicide itself is a phenomenon that occurs

throughout the world. World Health Organization reports that suicide account for 1.4% of all deaths in the world, and making it the 18th leading cause of death in 2016 (World Health Organization, 2018). Usually, there is a message left behind before a person dies, or intends to die by suicide. People who write suicide notes are likely to beg something, or ask for forgiveness, or even blaming their family, their friends or their society for their life's failings. Those written words hide some truth that must be revealed. In this case, language plays an important role in uncovering the truth beyond those written words.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is an approach to linguistics which is usually called Functional Grammar. This theory proposed by M.A.K Halliday in his first book entitled An Introduction to Functional Grammar (1985). Halliday defines functional grammar as a natural grammar in the sense that everything in it can be explained by reference to how language is used. When analyzing text, grammar becomes a thing that can describe how language works. This theory focuses on how to understand the quality of texts, why a text means what it does, and why it is valued as it is. SFL as an approach developed by Halliday is based on the language metafunction and language relations as a social representation and social function.

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) emphasize a dimension called metafunctions which consist of interpersonal, textual, and ideational components. This metafunction is mostly related to the use of transitivity which includes the elements of the processes, participants and circumstances. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the three categories of metafunction are classified based on how people use language:

Interpersonal Metafunction

This Systemic Functional Linguistics is based on the claim that people are always talking to and with others. Bloor and Bloor in their book The Functional Analysis of English: a Hallidayan Approach (2004) say that in interpersonal metafunction, language is used so that someone can participate in communicative actions with others, to take roles in society, and also to express and understand feelings, attitudes, and even judgments (p. 11). The

interpersonal metafunction shows that language is about both interactive and personal. There is always something else happening at the same time, every time we use language to construe meaning. Language always makes connecting our personal and social relationships with others around us.

Textual Metafunction

According to Bloor and Bloor (2004), Language is used to relate texts and linguistic events to what is said or written so that the language is used to organize the text itself (p. 11). In language, grammar also shows another meaning that relates to the construction of the text. In other words, textual metafunction can be considered as a metafunction that facilitates the other two metafunctions, interpersonal which enacting interpersonal relations and ideational which construing experience, because both of those metafunctions also depend on how to construct sequences of discourse and how the text could create cohesion and continuity as they move together.

Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction divided into two components, the experiential and the logical function. According to Bloor and Bloor (2004), Language is used as a tool to organize, understand and express our perceptions and understandings about the world (p. 10). This metafunction includes the experimental function which more concern with the grammatical choice that lets the speaker makes meaning and logical function that sets the logical relationship between one clausal with another.

Fontaine in Analysing English Grammar (2013) mentions that things relating to the representation of experience (experiential meaning) are organized in a system called the transitivity system (p.73). Transitivity is a very important concept that is often used as a basis for every analysis in the SFL framework. Fontaine also mentioned that Halliday bases his views of transitivity on verbs but he broadens his scope includes the grammar of processes, its participants and the elements of circumstances. The process in transitivity analysis divided into six processes and each process has its own category of meaning and its own participant. The processes and participants are distinguished according to whether they represent actions, speech, states of mind, or even states of being.

Some researchers had done the research on transitivity in various text (Zhang, 2017; Ong'onda, 2016; Salsabil, 2014; Nazhirin, 2013; Sudjana, 2013). However, none of the previous researches focuses on suicide or criminal material. The current article comes up to see the distributions of transitivity systems that might exist on the suicide notes written by three famous people who decided to commit suicide when their reputation was at its great. From the background above the problems that are identified in this article are: what transitivity system, including process types, participant functions, and circumstantial elements, used in the four suicide notes, and how is the transitivity system helping the writers of the suicide notes to convey their experiences according to the function of each process type, participant function, and circumstantial element.

METHOD

In conducting this research, the methods used are divided into several steps, including informants/ source of the data, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and trustworthiness of the data. The data of this research are four suicide notes written by three famous people who decided to commit suicide when their reputation was at its great. The four suicide notes were chosen because of the similarity of the writer's situation. The three of them decided to commit suicide when their career was at its great. In addition, the data were chosen because they were obtained from credible sources.

Then, this study aims to see how three famous people who committed suicide chose the words and arranged the clauses they used in their suicide notes. The data were chosen based on the similarity of the conditions of the three suicide notes' writers, where they decided to commit suicide when they were at the top of their career. In addition, the suicide notes were obtained from credible sources. In collecting the data, the suicide notes were segmented into sentences and then clauses. After that, each clause was identified and labeled based on the theory of transitivity proposed by Halliday. The clauses were compiled in the form of tables after the clauses were categorized to determine their types of process type, participant function, and circumstantial element.

In conducting the analysis of the data, the researcher follows some stages of analyzing data. After collecting, identifying, and labeling the clauses based on the process type, participant function, and circumstantial element of transitivity proposed by Halliday, the clauses which were compiled in the form of tables were calculated based on the frequencies and percentages of each element of transitivity. The total of the presence of each transitivity element was divided in order to find the percentage of each process type, participant function, and circumstantial element out of the total number of all clauses in the suicide notes. The formula that was used in order to find the percentage is: part/whole x 100 = %. The realization of the formula is exemplified in the illustration below:

$$\frac{\text{Number of each type of process}}{\text{Total number of all processes}} \times 100 = \%$$

$$\frac{\text{Material process (55)}}{\text{Total processes (118)}} \times 100 = 46.61\%$$

Furthermore, the data that have been calculated based on the frequencies and percentages of each element of transitivity was carried into the process of interpretation by determining the most dominant process type, participant function, and circumstantial element.

The data for this research are suicide notes left by three famous people who decided to commit suicide when their reputation was at its great. The first suicide note is a six-page suicide letter written by Jiah Khan. The suicide note had been recovered from Jiah Khan's house after her death. In 2016, the suicide letter had been included in the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) Chargesheet and extensive investigations had been carried out by the CBI. The second suicide note was written by Kevin Carter. TIME, the world's largest weekly news magazine and news website, published an article in 2001 entitled *The Life and Death of Kevin Carter*. It says that Carter dead because of carbon monoxide poisoning inside his red pickup truck and there is a note left on the passenger seat beneath a knapsack. Then, the last is Virginia Woolf's suicide notes. Her two suicide notes published in her husband's autobiography, *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939 to*

1969 (1970) and in *Virginia Woolf: A Biography: Volume 2: 1912-1941* (1972) by Quentin Bell.

Then in order to achieve the credibility of the data for this research, the researchers carried out a deep and detailed observation of the data. The researcher read and reread the data carefully and comprehensively to make sure the data are suitable for the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data are taken from four suicide notes written by three famous people in the form of written text. Each clause of the texts was analyzed into process types, participant functions, and circumstantial elements, as the three constituents of the transitivity system. The process types were classified into the material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process. The participant functions are explained related to the process types. Then, the existence of circumstances in a clause is optional. Thus, only clauses that contain at least a circumstance of nine categories of circumstantial elements were analyzed in the discussion.

In this chapter, the findings of the study are divided into three kinds of tables. The first tables explain the process types, the second table explains about the participant functions, and the third tables will explain the circumstantial elements. Then the researcher will explain how the transitivity system found in the four suicide notes helps the writers of the suicide notes conveying their intentions according to the explanation of each process type, participant function, and circumstantial element.

Table 1. The total process types of transitivity analysis

Process	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Material	73	42.94
Mental	49	28.82
Relational	33	19.41
Behavioral	5	2.94
Verbal	9	5.30
Existential	1	0.59
Total	**170**	**100**

Based on the whole data, from 170 clauses, the 73 clauses are the material process and this makes it the dominant process. In contrast, the least process is the existential process which only occurs once

(0.59%) from the total 170 data. As in Jiah Khan's suicide note, the material process occurs 55 times (46.61%) and it is also the highest process found. The lowest frequency of occurrence in Jiah Khan's suicide note is the existential process which only occurs once (0.85%). Then in the second source of the data, Kevin Carter's suicide note, there are only two processes that occur, the material process and relational process. Both processes occur three times. Meanwhile, in both Virginia Woolf's suicide notes, there is no behavioral and existential process. In her first suicide note, the mental process is the highest process found which occurs 7 times (33.33%) and the lowest frequency of occurrence is the verbal process which only occurs 4 times (19.05%). In her second suicide note, the material process is the most process that occurs and the mental process is just in second place. The material process occurs 10 times (40%) and the lowest frequency of occurrence is only 2 times (8%) for the verbal process.

The material process is the process of doing and happening. Mainly, the material process involves the actor and the goal as the directly involved participants. But, there are also other participants which obliquely involved like the recipient, the client, the attribute, and the scope. The mental process refers to the process of thinking, perceiving, liking and wanting. It has the senser and the phenomenon as its participants. The mental process concerns with our experience of the world of our own consciousness. Then, the relational process is the process of being and having where something or an entity is said to be something else. They can be classified according to whether they are being used to identify something or they are used to assign a quality to something. The behavioral process is a process of physiological and psychological behavior, meanwhile the verbal process is a process of saying. The last is the existential process which is a process of existing.

Table 2. The total participant functions of transitivity analysis

Participant Function	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Actor	73	22.88
Goal	33	10.34
Recipient	4	1.25
Client	10	3.13

Attribute	3	0.94
Scope	11	3.45
Senser	49	15.36
Phenomenon	44	13.79
Carrier	29	9.09
Attribute	28	8.78
Identified	4	1.25
Identifier	4	1.25
Behaver	5	1.57
Behavior	-	-
Sayer	9	2.82
Target	-	-
Receiver	5	1.57
Verbiage	7	2.19
Existent	1	0.31
Total	**319**	**100**

From the tables 2, it can be concluded that the most dominant participants found in each suicide note are related to the most dominant process types in each suicide note.

Table 3. The total circumstantial elements of transitivity analysis

Circumstantial Elements	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage (%)
Extent	16	15
Location	48	44
Manner	18	17
Cause	8	7
Contingency	-	-
Accompaniment	9	8
Role	5	5
Matter	4	4
Angle	-	-
Total	**108**	**100**

Table 3 shows circumstantial elements found in the four suicide notes are the extent, location, manner, cause, accompaniment, role, and matter. From the four suicide notes, there are not circumstantial elements of contingency and angle. The dominant circumstance on each suicide note is the location which refers to place and time.

CONCLUSIONS

This research is about the distributions of the transitivity system that might exist in four suicide notes written by three famous people who decided to commit suicide when their reputation was at its great. It is also about how process types, participant functions, and circumstantial elements could convey the intentions of the suicide notes' writers. The data for this research are suicide notes left by Jiah Khan, Kevin Carter, and Virginia Woolf, who decided to commit suicide when their reputation was at its great.

The result of this research showed that there are 170 clauses analyzed in this research. There are 73 occurrences for the material process, 49 occurrences for the mental process, 33 occurrences for the relational process, 5 occurrences for the behavioral process, 9 occurrences for the verbal process, and 1 occurrence for the existential process. The numbers of the participant functions are related to the numbers of the process types. Then seeing from the circumstantial elements, there are only 108 occurrences: 16 occurrences for the extent, 48 occurrences for the location, 18 occurrences for the manner, 8 occurrences for the cause, 9 occurrences for the accompaniment, 5 occurrences for the role, and 4 occurrences for the matter.

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