Forensic Stylistics Analysis of Kim Jonghyun's Suicide Note

Analisis Forensik Stilistika pada Surat Bunuh Diri Kim Jonghyun

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INFORMASI ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
	This study examines the language and stylistic aspects of the suicide note left by Kim Jonghyun, a Kpop singer who tragically committed suicide in December 2017. Using Prokofyeva's (2013) theory of unique language patterns in suicide notes, this study attempts to analyze the motivation and mental state of the victim, shedding light on the field of forensic style. The research method utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the note's language features, such as clear logic, emotional expression, text structure, and grammar. The research revealed that the notes reflected common themes found in suicide notes, such as emphasis on past events, feelings of loneliness, and self-blame. Linguistic elements, such as the use of past tense and expressive language, provide information about Jonghyun's psychological state and his decision. Finally, this study contributes to better knowledge about suicide prevention and intervention measures, emphasizing the need for early detection and support for people dealing with mental health issues. *Abstrak* *Penelitian ini meneliti aspek bahasa dan gaya bahasa dari catatan bunuh diri yang ditinggalkan oleh Kim Jonghyun, seorang penyanyi Kpop yang secara tragis melakukan bunuh diri pada bulan Desember 2017. Dengan menggunakan teori Prokofyeva (2013) tentang pola bahasa yang unik dalam catatan bunuh diri, penelitian ini mencoba untuk menganalisis motivasi dan kondisi mental korban, memberikan pencerahan pada bidang gaya forensik. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk memeriksa fitur bahasa catatan tersebut, seperti logika yang jelas, ekspresi emosional, struktur teks, dan tata bahasa. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa catatan tersebut mencerminkan tema umum yang ditemukan dalam catatan bunuh diri, seperti penekanan pada peristiwa masa lalu, perasaan kesepian, dan menyalahkan diri sendiri. Unsur-unsur linguistik, seperti penggunaan bentuk lampau dan bahasa ekspresif, memberikan informasi tentang kondisi psikologis Jonghyun dan keputusannya. Akhirnya, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengetahuan yang lebih baik tentang pencegahan bunuh diri dan langkah-langkah intervensi, menekankan perlunya deteksi dini dan dukungan bagi orang-orang yang berurusan dengan masalah kesehatan mental.*

1. Introduction

Linguistic and language functions play a crucial role in expressing emotions and conveying messages (Afria, et., al. 2023). The choice of words, tone, and syntax can all impact the meaning and emotion conveyed in a message. For example, the use of sarcasm or irony can convey a completely different emotion than if the words were used literally. Similarly, the tone of a message can convey excitement, sadness, anger, or any other emotion. Additionally, the use of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice can further enhance the emotional impact of a message. Overall, linguistic and language functions are essential tools for effectively communicating emotions and messages to others.

Stylistic functions are an important aspect of text analysis and interpretation. They refer to the way in which the text is structured, organized, and presented, and how these features contribute to the meaning of the text. For example, the use of repetition, imagery, and metaphor can all help to convey a particular message or emotion in a text. Additionally, the use of rhetorical devices such as alliteration, hyperbole, and irony can also impact the meaning of the text. By analyzing the stylistic functions of a text, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the intended message and the author's purpose. For example, a text that uses a lot of metaphors and imagery may be intended to evoke a particular emotion or to convey a complex idea in a more accessible way. Overall, stylistic functions are a valuable tool for interpreting and understanding the meaning of a text.

The function of stylistic analysis in the context of suicide notes is to uncover the linguistic features and patterns that can provide insight into the emotional state and motivations of the individual who wrote the note. Stylistic analysis can help identify the use of repetition, imagery, and other rhetorical devices that may indicate depression, hopelessness, or a desire for escape. For example, the use of exclamation marks or capital letters may indicate a sense of urgency or desperation. Additionally, the use of certain words or phrases may indicate a particular emotional state, such as the use of words like "hopeless," "worthless," or "helpless." By analyzing the stylistic features of a suicide note, investigators can gain a deeper understanding of the individual's mental state and potentially identify any underlying psychological issues that may have contributed to their decision to take their own life.

This study aims to analyze a suicide letter from a case involving a Kpop star, Kim Jonghyun in December 2017. The suicide was a shock to fans around the world. Kim Jonghyun died in Seoul, South Korea. He rented a serviced apartment in the Cheongdam-dong neighborhood of the Gangnam District. The victim, suspected of suicide, left behind an apology letter mentioned a "devouring depression" and his struggles. This highlights the invisible burden celebrities can face.

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The researchers focus on this suicide note to examine its linguistic characteristics using Prokofyeva's (2013) theory.

Prokofyeva (2013) is cited as suggesting that genuine suicide notes exhibit five key linguistic features, such as clear reasoning, expressing emotion, text structure, grammar, and punctuation. These linguistic features are thought to offer insights into the motivations and psychological state of the person who wrote the suicide note. Clear reasoning pertains to the individual's explanation for their decision to end their life, which could be influenced by factors like illness, being offended, or blaming someone in a state of despair. Expressing emotions involves the use of language to convey feelings, such as fear of living or expressing last wishes and saying farewell to loved ones. Text structure, grammar, and punctuation are linguistic elements that aid in organizing and conveying the message effectively.

The literature review employed in this study was taken from the Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, specifically the article titled "The Characteristics of Linguistic Features Enfolded in Suicide Notes" authored by Ika Apriani Fata, Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf, Rahmat Kamal, and Ehsan Namaziandost, which was published in 2021. This article provided a comprehensive overview of the linguistic features present in suicide notes, offering valuable insights into the language patterns and stylistic characteristics that are often associated with these tragic events. The researchers in this study built upon the findings of Fata et al. by expanding their analysis to include a broader range of cases, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the linguistic features that are commonly found in suicide notes. Therefore, the researchers focused on one specific case of suicide and tried to understand why it happened by looking at the language used in the suicide note. The researchers used a theory by Prokofyeva to analyze the linguistic features and find clues about the person's mental state and emotions before they died. This helped the researchers understand the complex thoughts and feelings that led to the suicide.

2. Method

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the forensic stylistic approach towards suicide notes. The study aimed to demonstrate the linguistic features and interpret the messages conveyed by the victims in their suicide notes. Data collection is facilitated through the use of documentation. In this case, the documentary employs online data, specifically publicly accessible suicide notes of notable individuals. Instagram served as the source of the data utilized in the study.

The researchers followed several steps to conduct the research. First, they obtained data from a news article about a suicide at the apartment in the Cheongdam-dong neighborhood of the Gangnam District, which was revealed by Kim Jonghyun, in December 2017. The researchers collected documentation of the suicide notes left by the victim.

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Second, the data was analyzed using Prokofyeva's (2013) theory on characteristic and language features in suicide notes, which include clear reasoning, expressing emotion, text structure, grammar, and punctuation. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the analyzed data.

3. Result and Discussion

(Yonhap/Nine9`s Instagr

(Picture 1)

1) I was broken from the inside.
2) The depression slowly chipped me away, finally devouring me.
3) I could not beat the negativity.
4) I hated myself. Even though I tried so hard demanding my memories that kept getting cut off to 'wake up,' all I got in return was silence.
5) I'd rather stop if I cannot breathe.
6) I asked who could be responsible for me.
7) You're the only one.
8) I felt utterly alone.
9) It is easy to say "I'm going to end it."
10) It is very difficult to actually go through with it.
11) I've been struggling through the difficulty.
12) I told myself that it's just me wanting to run away from everything.
13) It's true. I really did want to run away.
14) From me.
15) From you.
16) I asked, "Who's there?" It's me. It's me again. And it's me the third time.
17) I asked, "Why do I keep on losing my memory?" They said it's due to my personality. I see. It's all my fault.
18) I wanted someone to notice (my suffering), but no one knew. Of course, they wouldn't. They never met me before.
19) I asked why people live. Just. Just. They live "just because."
20) If I ask why people died, they would probably say they couldn't bear it any longer.
21) Troubling thoughts flooded my head. I never got the chance to learn how to change dull pain into pure joy.
22) Pain is just pain.
23) I kept reprimanding myself not to do so.
24) Why? Why can't I even end my life with my own will?
25) I tried figuring out the reasons for my pain and suffering.
26) I already had the answer. I was in pain because of me.

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It's all my fault that I carry so many imperfections.

27) Teacher, is this what you wanted to hear?

28) No. I didn't do anything wrong.

29) I used to think that it's so easy for doctors to blame your personality for the suffering in their calm voice.

30) It surprises me how I am feeling this much pain. Those people, who have suffered worse than I, seem to go on living perfectly fine. Those weaker than I am live on as well. I guess not. Among the living, there is no one who is suffering worse and no one who is weaker.

31) The only answer I got back was "just live nevertheless."

32) Asking the purpose of life more than one hundred times is not for me. It's for you.

33) I wanted to do it for me.

34) Please don't say things you don't know.

35) How could you ask me to still look for reasons behind my pain? I told you multiple times why I'm suffering. Do I need more reasons to be in pain? More dramatic details in my stories? More stories even?

36) I told you already. Were you absent-minded when I told you? Things you can bear and even come above do not leave scars.

37) It wasn't my responsibility to go against the world.

38) It wasn't my path to become world-famous.

39) That's why they say it's hard to go against the world and to become famous.

40) Why did I choose this path? It's quite funny now that I think about it.

41) It's a miracle that I endured through it all this time.

42) What more can I say. Just tell me "good job."

43) You did great. Tell me I suffered enough.

44) Even though you can't laugh right now, just don't send me off blaming me.

45) Good job.

46) You suffered a great deal.

47) Good-bye.

1. Clear Reasoning

Prokofyeva's theory on clear reasoning in suicide notes is based on three categories: disease, offended by something, and blaming somebody in lose hope. Clear reasoning is spoken to by the answer to the question "why?" and is echoed by the conjunction sentence, phrase, and clause of "because". In Kim Jonghyun's suicide notes he felt hopeless about his life where it was written,

I was broken from the inside.
The depression slowly chipped me away, finally devouring me.
I could not beat the negativity.
I hated myself. Even though I tried so hard demanding my memories that kept getting cut off to 'wake up,' all I got in return was silence.
I'd rather stop if I cannot breathe

In his last letter, Jonghyun stated that depression had destroyed him so that he had no hope of living

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anymore. Followed by the phrase "*I'd rather stop if I can't breathe*", which supported that he was no longer capable of living and wanted to end his life.

2. Expressing Emotions

In suicide notes expressing emotions is very important to examine so that we know that the note from the person who died is true or not. Expressing emotions reveals a fear of living, having no relief, hopelessness, and the absence of doubt (Prokofyeva, 2013). In this suicide note, there is a sense of hopelessness from within. It can be believed by the many sentences of despair and feeling alone that he delivered.

In the 8th line "I felt utterly alone", it describes that he felt lonely and had no one to support him to survive. Followed by 25th line "*I tried figuring out the reasons for my pain and suffering*" and 26th "*I already had the answer. I was in pain because of me. It's all my fault that I carry so many imperfections*", this line also demonstrates self-reproach for not being perfect. He is so depressed that he blames himself for everything that happens to him.

The predominant emotion in suicide notes is a sense of belonging that can lead to a feeling of offense against the world or an existence that has become tiresome (Prokofyeva, 2013). This phrase expressed his exhaustion from the pain he had already been through, line 35th "*How could you ask me to still look for reasons behind my pain? I told you multiple times why I'm suffering. Do I need more reasons to be in pain? More dramatic details in*

my stories? More stories even?" and line 36th "*I told you already. Were you absent-minded when I told you? Things you can bear and even come above do not leave scars*".

Moreover, in the 46th line "You suffered a great deal" and 47th line "Good-bye", he stated that he was suffering a lot.

3. Text Structure

Suicide letters have many forms and similarities like other suicide letters. The structure of the sentences they use are mostly the same. (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. Suicide victims usually make various excuses in their letters.

I was broken from the inside. The depression slowly chipped me away, finally devouring me. I could not beat the negativity. I hated myself. Even though I tried so hard demanding my memories that kept getting cut off to 'wake up,' all I got in return was silence. I'd rather stop if I cannot breathe. I asked who could be responsible for me. You're the only one. I felt utterly alone. It is easy to say "I'm going to end it." It is very difficult to actually go through with it. I've been struggling through the difficulty.

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I told myself that it's just me wanting to run away from everything.
It's true. I really did want to run away.
From me.
From you.

In the 1st to 15th lines, he conveys his feelings of devastation and depression that have completely enveloped him. He felt very lonely and could not overcome the negativity within himself. The sentence above states that he also wanted to escape the reality of his depression.

I asked, "Who's there?" It's me.
It's me again. And it's me the third time.
I asked, "Why do I keep on losing my memory?" They said it's due to my personality. I see. It's all my fault.
I wanted someone to notice (my suffering), but no one knew. Of course, they wouldn't. They never met me before.
I asked why people live. Just. Just. They live "just because."
If I ask why people died, they would probably say they couldn't bear it any longer.
Troubling thoughts flooded my head. I never got the chance to learn how to change dull pain into pure joy.
Pain is just pain.
I kept reprimanding myself not to do so.
Why? Why can't I even end my life with my own will?
I tried figuring out the reasons for my pain and suffering.

I already had the answer. I was in pain because of me. It's all my fault that I carry so many imperfections.
Teacher, is this what you wanted to hear?
No. I didn't do anything wrong.
I used to think that it's so easy for doctors to blame your personality for the suffering in their calm voice.
It surprises me how I am feeling this much pain. Those people, who have suffered worse than I, seem to go on living perfectly fine. Those weaker than I am live on as well. I guess not.
Among the living, there is no one who is suffering worse and no one who is weaker.
The only answer I got back was "just live nevertheless."
Asking the purpose of life more than one hundred times is not for me. It's for you.
I wanted to do it for me.
Please don't say things you don't know.
How could you ask me to still look for reasons behind my pain? I told you multiple times why I'm suffering. Do I need more reasons to be in pain? More dramatic details in my stories? More stories even?
I told you already. Were you absent-minded when I told you?
Things you can bear and even come above do not leave scars.

In the sentence above, he explained what he had been feeling. He suffered a lot in dealing with his acute depression. He went to the doctor to treat his depression but the answer he got was always "just live

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nevertheless". That answer may not have helped him out of his depression, his loneliness. The people around him always wondered about what happened to him just out of curiosity. Because in the last sentence he emphasized his disappointment by saying "*Do I need more reasons to be in pain? More dramatic details in my stories?*"

It wasn't my responsibility to go against the world.
It wasn't my path to become world-famous.
That's why they say it's hard to go against the world and to become famous.
Why did I choose this path? It's quite funny now that I think about it.
It's a miracle that I endured through it all this time.
What more can I say. Just tell me "good job."
You did great. Tell me I suffered enough.
Even though you can't laugh right now, just don't send me off blaming me.
Good job.
You suffered a great deal.
Good-bye.

In this letter he delivers his final message with negative emotions. According to Ioannou and Debowska (2014) claim that victims adopt the stereotype of suicide motive as their explanation, which is typically communicated through negative emotion. After explaining what happened in his life, the suffering he felt, and what drove him to want to end his life. His statement culminates in his final sentence with a reaffirmation that he is in great pain and the addition of the phrase "good-bye".

4. Grammar

There are many grammar characteristics in suicide texts. The victim's suicide note is particularly interesting to note. Galasinski (2017) stated that victims of suicide notes typically write the situation from present to past, and the statements referring to present and future are fewer compared to past. Hence, the past tense is the most frequently used tense rather than the other tenses in suicide notes (Prokofyeva, 2013).

In line 29th "*I used to think that it's so easy for doctors to blame your personality for the suffering in their calm voice*" from this phrase, he used the past tense in his notes. "used" refers to the past where he used to think that it was easy for doctors to calm you down with their calm voices. In the 30th line "*It surprises me how I am feeling this much pain. Those people, who have suffered worse than I, seem to go on living perfectly fine. Those weaker than I am live on as well. I guess not. Among the living, there is no one who is suffering worse and no one who is weaker.*", in this line he states that people who are sick suffer more than him but can continue living but he feels unable to continue living.

5. Punctuation

Punctuation is the most crucial aspect in analyzing suicide notes. Schoene and Dethlef (2016) stated that the use of punctuation depends on her life experiences such

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as background, education level, social status and family. Hence, punctuation can be a used to express emotions or represent the victim's condition.

Furthermore, punctuation can give meaning to a sentence. The term 'meaningful' punctuation refers to certain models that are commonly found in suicide notes. Eber-Schmid (2017) pointed out that this communication (punctuation) can counter a misunderstanding and place the victim's emotions in a text. Prokofyeva (2013) put forward some examples of frequent punctuation models found in suicide notes:

a. "--" (double-dash): it is used as a sign which can function as a comma, a dash, or periods.
b. "..." (three or more periods at the end of a sentence/phrase): they are used to express the idea of an 'open-ended or a continuation. This sign gives hope that what has been said is not the end.
c. "!!!" (three, occasionally one, exclamation marks): they are used to emphasize a word or phrase's significance.

In this suicide note, the researcher could not find the punctuational models as like in Prokofyeva Theory such as "--" (double-dash), "..." (three or more periods at the end of a sentence/phrase), and "!!!" (three, occasionally one, exclamation marks).

The implication of this study is to enhance our understanding of the language and stylistic features of suicide notes, which can, in turn, facilitate the identification of warning signs indicative of a person's vulnerable psychological state. By applying forensic stylistic analysis to the examination of suicide notes, researchers can uncover subtle indications of mental crisis at an early stage, thereby enabling more effective interventions. The study's findings can also contribute to a greater public awareness of mental health and suicide risk by providing insights into common language patterns in suicide notes that may signal suicide risk. This research can serve as a foundation for the development of more sophisticated evaluation tools to assess suicide risk, which can be utilized by mental health professionals to identify individuals at high risk and create targeted intervention strategies. The study's implications also underscore the importance of continued research in the field of forensic stylistics and mental health, as further studies can help to elucidate the intricate relationships between language, emotion, and behavior in the context of mental health. By applying the findings from this study, we can strengthen suicide prevention efforts and enhance the quality of mental health services for individuals in need, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive and effective approach to addressing mental health crises.

4. Conclusion

This study conducts a thorough linguistic and stylistic analysis of Kim Jonghyun's suicide note, providing vital insights into the inner agony and

psychological state of those considering suicide. Using Prokofyeva's theory and a descriptive qualitative approach, the study reveals the complex relationship of emotions, thinking, and language in suicide communication. Jonghyun's note contains common themes found in suicide notes, including sentiments of despair, loneliness, and self-blame. The study gives insights into Jonghyun's personal difficulties and decision to commit suicide by analyzing linguistic traits such as tense usage and emotive language. These findings emphasize the importance of language and stylistic studies in comprehending the complexity of suicide notes, contributing to improved suicide prevention and intervention techniques. This study hopes to raise awareness and empathy for those in trouble by emphasizing the importance of early detection and support for people dealing with mental health issues.

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