

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents conclusions of the study. These conclusions are the summary generated from the findings of the moves and step analysis of suicide notes which has been discussed in Chapter Four of this study. It also discusses the limitations of the present study and offers some implications of the study for the field of discourse analysis and forensic linguistics. Some recommendations are also provided as to give more information as well as guidance for future researchers who are interested in doing an analysis on suicide notes.

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of the study reported in this thesis was to investigate the rhetorical moves in suicide notes by examining the communicative purpose in order that a generic structure may be established. The analysis of genre using ESP approach revealed that suicide notes share a rhetorical move and step structure and communicative purposes. It is also discovered that suicide notes constitute an *occluded* genre (Swales, 1996), where a *rhetorical community* (Miller, 1994; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010) is visible, but we cannot define the apparent *discourse community* (Samraj & Gawron, 2015; Abaalkhail, 2015).

The researcher found five *quasi-obligatory* moves, within which there are 22 steps, across the samples taken from each category (n=44) with the percentages between 77-81%. The five moves are *addressing recipient*, *providing explanation*, *giving directions*, *expressing feelings*, and *signing off*. *Addressing recipient* is the move that occurs the most often among all (81.81%). The steps used in the moves did not occur exclusively, meaning that a move might be realized by using more than one step (cf. Swales, 1990).

From the five *quasi-obligatory* moves, *addressing recipient* and *signing off* are the only moves which positions can be fixed into certain orders. Most of the

addressing recipient move occurred as the first move in suicide notes while *signing off* commonly occurred last when not followed by postscripts. The other three moves had flexible order within suicide notes; in other words, they appeared in different orders across the data. However, having calculated the frequencies of occurrences order, it is drawn that *providing explanations* usually comes after *addressing recipient*, followed by *giving directions* and *expressing feelings*, respectively. Other structural moves found in the analysis were *apologizing*, *announcing death*, and *commentary on letters*. However, since they occurred in less than 50% of the texts (the highest was *apologizing* move, which occurred in 40% of the analyzed texts), they were considered *optional* moves (Joseph et al., 2014) and were not included in the typical generic structure.

The analysis of the four categories into which the researcher classified the notes reveals that men and women in the data population shared similar concerns in writing their parting notes even though there is a difference in the most dominant communicative purpose in the notes written by males and females; it is also discovered that time of writing does not have much impact to what people want to express in their last message. Thus, it may be drawn that in the population of suicide notes that the researcher has, gender and time do not have big influence the main communicative purposes of suicide notes—to justify the act of suicide and to express the writer’s personal feelings, which is achieved through the moves *providing explanations* (especially the step *providing reasons and/or justifications*) and *expressing feelings*. Some suicide notes have multiple purposes aside from the main communicative purposes (Askehave, 1999; Askehave & Swales, 2001), such as apologizing and leaving instructions for survivors

Both the rhetorical move structure and the communicative purposes found in the analyzed suicide notes suggest that suicide notes constitute a genre. This genre does not belong to a specific discourse community where members become experts through acculturation, but it is of a broader speech community which examples are not easily obtained by writers prior to writing their own notes. It is believed that the rhetorical features of this genre is driven by the genuine

communicative purposes of the writers rather than author's imitation of available patterns, and therefore simulated or fake suicide notes may be differentiated from genuine ones by trained suicidologists and forensic linguists through evidence from various studies comparing simulated and genuine suicide notes (Leenaars, 2004; Olsson, 2009).

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The study is subject to several limitations. The first limitation relates to the sample of suicide notes. The data examined in this study contain an imbalanced number of data in the different time period. From the total of 216 notes, only 69 were written after year 1990 while the rest belong to the time periods of 1970-1987. In spite of the new findings provided, the researcher cannot generalize the results on grounds of the limited size of the sample of newer suicide notes.

Ratio of suicide notes is the second limitation of the study. The majority of suicide notes in the corpus used by the researcher were written by males (n=123) and only 34 notes were written by females. This initial difference created a disproportion when 20% samples were taken from each group. Cannetto and Lester (2002) and Delgado (2013) mentioned that gender affects the language used in suicide notes; however, due to the ratio of females and males being uneven, it is difficult to make broader generalizations of the rhetorical structure of suicide notes even though it is found that there is a difference in the communicative purposes between the two genders in their writing.

The third limitation is that the suicide notes were analyzed without looking at their context. Bhatia (1993) and Giles (2007) suggest that context would provide better understanding into the genre in question. In the case of suicide notes, context can be provided by the coroner's office and/or interviewing friends and family members of the deceased. However, since the researcher got her data from the Internet and her personal communication with a fellow researcher in addition to her not having access to the coroner's and family members of the deceased, the suicide notes were obtained as merely texts.

Another limitation to the study is the geographical locations of the notes used in this study. The corpus of notes used in this analysis only consisted of suicide notes written in Australia, America and England. As a result, it is unclear whether cross-cultural factor has an impact to the rhetorical structure of suicide notes, and generalizations may be limited to notes written by people raised in western culture.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on genre theory and suicide notes research. The present study shows that genre in ESP approach is applicable to non-academic texts and that move structure analysis is a tool that is able to explicate the communicative purposes of an occluded genre. Furthermore, it shows that move structure analysis can be employed to analyze a genre with variations in structure and length, and that texts belonging to a genre are not always characterized by having all *obligatory* moves but by sharing a family resemblance to each other (Swales, 1990).

For the field of Sociolinguistics, especially gender study, this thesis can give a reference about the way females use language differently (or similarly) from males in terms of what they want to express most in their last attempt of communication.

The findings of this study can also be utilized by forensic linguists in verifying the authenticity of a suicide text, especially if combined with other method of analysis with the addition of available contextual information. Prokofyeva (2013) stated that genuine suicide notes have certain patterns since note writers usually have thought about what they wanted to communicate in the notes; thus, the researcher believes that move structure analysis may be applied to examine the macro-structure of a suicide note in order that the genuineness of the note may be ascertained.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the limitation of this research, the researcher suggests that future studies should focus on a more balance proportion of corpus of suicide notes written by females and males to achieve more general conclusions about the structure of suicide notes. In addition, it is also suggested that future research find contemporary corpus of suicide notes rather than reusing the old ones. A study of newer corpus may provide better and more updated insights about the structure of suicide notes.

Studies of suicide notes tend to be based on Shneidman's original corpus of suicide notes, and when researchers used different corpora they tend to use suicide notes written in western countries. It is necessary that further investigations are conducted using corpora of suicide notes obtained from different locations and cultures so that broader generalizations can be made about the rhetorical structure of suicide notes.

In addition, future research may include the micro-structure of the suicide notes by focusing on different aspects, such as conducted by Roubidoux (2012), who focused on the pronouns use in relation to power relations in suicide notes. The researcher agrees with Abaalkhail (2015) that "a rhetorical analysis might be conducted on a corpus of fake suicide notes to devise a rhetorical structure of these texts" so that the results can be compared to genuine suicide notes'.