Linguistic Oddness in Philippine Suicide Notes: A Forensic Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The increasing interest that the phenomenon of suicide gained across research disciplines has stimulated diverse research perspectives on how to examine the language of suicide embedded in suicide notes to characterize the consistent and prevalent linguistic structures and attitudes of suicide-attempters and completers. This study aimed to describe and examine the anatomical oddness features and structures of suicide notes written by Filipino suicide-completers. As qualitative research, this study employed forensic discourse analysis as a method of analysis through Shapero's (2011) linguistic oddness framework. This study analyzed 59 genuine suicide notes written in English and Filipino languages. The findings revealed that Filipino note-writers hovered on melodramatic emotions, inconsistencies in logic and naming references, incorrect spellings, the vagueness of details, and repetition of overly stated thoughts or ideas which projected awkwardness, inappropriateness, and oddness in the suicide structure. The study recommends embarking on larger Filipino suicide corpora for a broader scope and interpretation and typify characteristics of suicide notes written in the English

	language from the suicide notes written in the Filipino language.

Introduction

Suicide notes are written or recorded messages left by individuals who either committed suicide or intended to commit suicide (Darbonne, 1969; Leenaars, 1988; Ho et al., 1998; Prokofyeva, 2013). As these notes are considered markers of severity of the suicide acts, they often posit significant perceptions on how suicidal individuals think before performing suicide. They usually function to convince the reader(s) or addressee(s) that the act committed or about to commit is justifiable (McClelland et al., 2000; Salib et al., 2002). Further, these texts offer true motivations and reasons for the act of suicide (Ho et al., 1998; Canetto & Lester, 2002) and could take various forms which range from notes, letters, notebooks, diaries, poems, greeting cards, transcribed audio, or videotapes, and even posts and blog entries on the internet (Shapero, 2011; Prokofyeva, 2013).

Overtly, suicide notes are part of the non-established genres, which Swales (2007) described as occluded because of their extreme privacy and inaccessibility. Unlike any of the established genres, suicide notes are written privately by note-writers who may never have read a suicide note before. They are generally hidden from public sight and function. Thus, access to sample suicide guide texts for writing is substantially difficult. However, behind this status, these notes have earned a position of questions and relevance among researchers, particularly in understanding people's thoughts with suicidal tendencies.

The increasing interest that the phenomenon of suicide gained across research disciplines has stimulated diverse research perspectives on how the language of suicide embedded in suicide notes could be examined to characterize the consistent and prevalent linguistic structures and attitudes of suicide-attempters and completers. As such, these notes as pieces of suicide evidence are reflected as good sources of data for linguistic inquiry, specifically in providing suicide insights and reasons for committing suicide acts. Thus, researchers from interdisciplinary scholarships have analyzed an array of suicide notes to provide interpretations and understanding of the thoughts of suicidal individuals (Abaalkhail, 2015).

One of the defining anatomical features of suicide notes is the apparent linguistic oddness that hovers the genre. Shapero (2011) used the term *oddness* to refer to some features of a suicide note that seems out of place or unnatural within its context. It can also indicate that something is amiss or inappropriate with the text (Coulthard, 1994; Coulthard and Johnson, 2007; Fox, 1993; Gibbons, 2003). Linguistic oddness may come in over-specificity or under-specificity or, as Gibbons (2003) termed this as over-elaboration or under-elaboration. Olsson (2004) also referred to a similar concept but coined it as inconsistency.

Considering suicide notes as crucial evidence used in the investigation of death, forensic discourse analysis (FDA) serves as an appropriate method of linguistic inquiry in providing an avenue in distinguishing linguistic features of a suicide. As a specialized field of discourse analysis, FDA holds a scientific study of linguistic evidence used for law enforcement and delivery of social justice (Kredens, 2016). It analyzes spoken and written discourse in legal settings, such as analyzing written evidence provided in a court of law. Also, Royce (2014) referred to the term FDA as the application of text analytic techniques to whole texts and their constituent parts, including the analysis of style, word choice, spelling, punctuation, rhetorical strategies, and the overall structure of written verbal, or electronic texts. The main focus of forensic discourse analysis is to provide linguistic evidence for legal cases. With the FDA's method to analyze and discriminate linguistic evidence used for law enforcement and legal cases, the language embedded in the occluded genre of suicide notes could be determined, including its structures, topics/themes, and textual regularities and irregularities. Further, forensic discourse analysis could also examine the function a suicide note holds in a suicide act.

There have been previous studies across the globe that examined suicide notes as research focus like that of Durkheim (1951), Shneidman and Farberow (1957), Darbonne (1969), Leenaars (1988), Black (1993), and Linn and Lester (1996). However, most of the analyses came from psychological, psychiatric, and sociological viewpoints centered on testing psychological views and theories of behavior and the preset claims of behavioral language categories used in suicide. Only a few studies on suicide notes have focused on the linguistic or discursive stance like that of Osgood and Walker (1959), Gottschalk and Gleser (1960), Ogilvie et al. (1966), Edelman and Renshaw (1982), and Gregory (1999). However, most

of these studies were conducted more than 50 years ago, and thus, this necessitates new and updated studies on linguistic viewpoints of inquiry.

Behind the increasing interest in suicide research around the globe, research on suicide notes remains unpopular in the Philippines which, in effect, impedes the development of studies in this area. Moreover, there is still no clear body of literature and database of suicide notes in the archipelago. Even though there were pioneering studies in mainland Luzon, most of these are from the perspectives of characterizing legal texts and the plight for plain English writing. No studies have categorically explored suicide notes as a niche for linguistic inquiry. With this, the researcher found the necessity to undertake a forensic discourse-based study focusing on linguistic oddness in suicide notes written by Filipino note-writers in the Philippines. Furthermore, the researcher aimed to address the lack of study of suicide notes in the present body of literature and make a theoretical insight into the field of forensic linguistics in the Philippines.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to uncover the distinctive features of linguistic oddness manifested in suicide notes written by Filipino suicide-completers. Specifically, the study was guided by the research question 'What are the linguistic oddness found in Philippine suicide notes in terms of incorrect/inconsistent spelling, naming references, detail of phraseology, illogic, vagueness, melodrama, and miscellaneous?'.

Linguistic Oddness Framework

Shapero's (2011) Framework of Suicide Note Analysis provides and elaborates a qualitative and quantitative forensic discourse approach to analyzing suicide notes. In his framework, suicide notes are examined through their anatomy and linguistic oddness. Anatomy and linguistic oddness specify how note-writers begin and end a suicide message. This feature of suicide message outlines some categories that appear salient in writing notes of suicide. These *sub-features include topic categories, meta-categories, and linguistic oddness.*

The focus of this investigation is linguistic oddness. Oddness is a linguistic indication that something is inappropriate, unnatural, or

inconsistent within a text and which may come over-elaboration or under-elaboration or over-specific or under-specific (Gibbons, 2003; Olsson, 2004; Shapero, 2011). In this study, linguistic oddness was investigated through the sub-categories classified by Shapero (2011), namely: incorrect/inconsistent spelling, naming references, detail of phraseology, logic/illogic, vagueness, melodrama, and miscellaneous. Table 1 shows Shapero's (2011) Linguistic Oddness Framework.

Table 1

Linguistic Oddness Framework (Shapero, 2011)

Oddness	Description	Sample Instances
Incorrect or Inconsistent Spelling	This assumes misspelled or inconsistent spellings of family members, relatives, or friends or simply words commonly used daily.	*sory* for *sorry* *Keeley* for *Kelly*
Naming References	This category constitutes awkwardness to references of names and roles and is mainly dependent upon the role of the addressee.	Please be good to little **Betty**, **our daughter**, I love her so.
Detail of Phraseology	This assumes oddness specifically in the use of nouns preceded by the definite article *'the'*.	I cannot stand **the suffering** any longer.
Logic or Illogic	This sub-category postulates over-specificity to the intended addressee, a juxtaposition of concepts, context-dependent-illogicality, and a pragmatically non-sensical point of view.	*I do not know why I am doing this* unless my reasoning has gone all to pot.
Vagueness	This consists of non-specific items in a suicide note; it does not refer to the lexis itself or words which include *"things"*, *"all"*, or *"everything"* but on the idea that there is no accompanying amplification or detail with it.	I'm tired of **it all**.

Melodrama	This highlights melodramatic prose, high-flown ideas in a note that fit the concept of melodrama.	I am thinking of all the wonderful *minutes, days, years* I have spent with you.
Miscellaneous	This is a repetition of words and names to pronoun references.	*Good bye good bye good bye good bye good bye good bye*

Incorrect or inconsistent spelling indicates that something is amiss with the text. This may assume misspelled or inconsistent spellings of names of family members, relatives, or friends or simply words commonly used daily. *Naming references* constitute awkwardness to reference names and roles and are mainly dependent upon the role of the addressee. *Detail of phraseology* is oddness in using nouns preceded by the article 'the'. It normalizes a diverged pattern of using infrequently used nouns in a note, leading to an oddness effect. For example, the phrase '*the suffering*' in the line 'I cannot stand *the suffering* any longer' indicates detail of phraseology as oddness. The oddness is derived from the position that the phrase 'the suffering' is rarely used to indicate a person's bearing of own suffering. In most notes, 'my suffering' is usually the typical pattern. Hence, to use 'the suffering' to refer to ones' own suffering is considered odd.

On the other hand, *logic or illogic* is a sub-category that postulates over-specificity to the intended addressee, illogical in the note-writer's addressees, a juxtaposition of concepts, context-dependent-illogicality, and pragmatically non-sensical point of view. Other examples of logical oddness include a note saying that the note-writer was being unreasonable in killing himself, a note expressing doubt about committing suicide, and notes expressing hope that no one would be distressed or embarrassed by the suicide. The logic oddness referred to here is not logic in the formal sense but rather a common sense. *Vagueness* consists of non-specific items in a suicide note. This does not refer to the lexis itself or words that include 'things', 'all', or 'everything' but on the idea that there is no accompanying amplification or detail. *Melodrama* highlights melodramatic prose, or as Arbeit and Blatt (1973) coined it as embellishment. These are high-flown ideas in a note that fit the concept

of melodrama. Vagueness and melodrama can appear obvious and may vary in subjectivity. *Miscellaneous*, as a sub-category under linguistic oddness, includes repetition of words and name to pronoun reference.

Methodology

This study is qualitative research employing forensic discourse analysis through the framework of Shapero (2011) on linguistic oddness. As qualitative research, the study involved interpretative and naturalistic approaches to the case of suicide notes in the Philippines. This means that the investigation of the suicide corpora was done in their natural settings, attempting to sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that writers bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Particularly, through the lens of forensic discourse analysis, the study uncovered and described the anatomical features of linguistic oddness in suicide notes written in English and Filipino languages by Filipino suicide-completers.

Data Gathering of the Corpora of Suicide Notes

In partnership with Simon (2015), the corpora of suicide notes were collected from newspapers across the Philippines that reported and published verified suicide acts. These suicide letters were marked and validated by Philippine National Police (PNP) as genuine suicide notes left by Filipino suicide-completers. In the raw collection of the suicide notes, the researcher observed the following selection and inclusion criteria:

(a) *The note should be in complete text and primarily illustrated as a photograph in the published news article.* This measure was critically considered to ensure that the suicide notes were free from distortions, modifications, and other typological errors. This was critical since this research aimed to investigate Philippine suicide notes in their natural, original, and authentic form and setting;

(b) *The note must be marked and stated explicitly as a genuine suicide note in the news article as verified by the police authorities in the Philippines.* This was an essential measure in the study since the investigation aims to reveal and characterize linguistic oddness that hovered in genuine suicide notes;

(c) *The person who committed the suicide and left the suicide note is a Filipino, and this detail must be stated explicitly in the news article.* This

measure ensured that the scope of the data was written exclusively by Filipino suicide-completers before committing the act of suicide;

(d) *The language of the suicide note is either written in English, Filipino, Cebuano, or a combination of two or all of the said languages.* This measure ensured that the linguistic oddness manifested in suicide notes is examined in the context of Philippine English, Filipino, or Cebuano languages; and

(e) *The newspapers that reported a case of suicide and published the suicide notes were either nationally or regionally circulated.* This measure helped the researcher narrow the verifiable sources of suicide notes. In this study, the names or titles of the newspapers were omitted in the investigation. This is to purposely maintain the anonymity of the note-writers which is a critical ethical consideration of the investigation.

Table 2

Corpora of the Study

Corpora Category		Number of Notes
Suicide Notes Written in English		29
Suicide Notes Written in Filipino/Cebuano		30
	Total	59

Given the selection and inclusion criteria, only 59 suicide notes published in Philippine newspapers met the data collection measures and served as the corpora and unit of analyses in this study. Out of the 59 suicide notes, 29 were written in English language, and 30 notes were written in Filipino/Cebuano. The notes were written by Filipino male and female suicide-completers aged 15 to 55 years old. The collected suicide letters were written from the year 2000 to 2016.

Data Preparation and Analysis

The preparation of suicide notes for analyses started with establishing a corpora coding system. The corpora coding system was followed to establish a systematic order, reference, and validation in analyzing and presenting the suicide notes. Since there were two corpora

categories as illustrated in Table 2, the corpora coding system was divided into two clusters, namely: *SNE* and *SNF*. SNE stands for *Suicide Notes written in English* while SNF refers to *Suicide Notes written in Filipino/Tagalog*. The code *No. 01* is the sequence number of the individual suicide note in the corpora compilation. The *M* and F (Male and Female) represent the codes for the gender of the note-writers. The digits after the code for gender (i.e., 38) illustrate the age of the note-writer during the act of suicide. An example of a coded suicide note is SNE No. 01-F-38 where No. 01 is note 1 in the corpora sequence of suicide notes written in the English language in which the note-writer is a female aged 38 years old at the time of suicide.

Using the lens of forensic discourse analysis through Shapero's framework, the researcher identified, analyzed, and described the linguistic oddness prevalent and consistent in the suicide notes written by Filipino suicide-completers. The examination of linguistic oddness in suicide notes in this study was limited only to incorrect or inconsistent spelling, naming references, detail of phraseology, logic or illogic, vagueness, melodrama, and miscellaneous. With this, the researcher followed a topical approach of analysis and review based on these seven oddness categories. Hence, the analyses involved seven stages.

The results and findings of the analyses were subjected to the rigorous process of intercoder reliability and validity review. The intercoders and reviewers consisted of forensic practitioners and faculty experts in forensic linguistics. The forensic practitioners have backgrounds in document analysis and criminology while the faculty reviewers have track records in conducting studies related to language and law and have undergone a short course training on forensic linguistic analysis. The inter-coders were briefed on Shapero's Framework on Linguistic Oddness and were asked to independently and separately code and review the researcher's raw and consolidated results. Another two faculty experts in forensic linguistics were tapped to review the interpretation of the results and findings of the study. This measure was done to assess and establish the soundness, trustworthiness, and validity of the results and interpretations yielded in the analyses. Moreover, the researcher utilized the criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the evaluation of the analyses. Using Cohen's Kappa Statistic, the result of the intercoder reliability test yielded at 0.89. This statistic is interpreted as a strong level of agreement at 95% confidence intervals (McHugh, 2012).

Finally, the extraction of excerpts from the original corpora of suicide notes was reviewed and validated for consistency, reliability, and truthfulness purposes. This move was carefully considered in this study to avoid manipulation and ensure that the excerpts that illustrate or manifest each category of linguistic oddness are accurate and the same as the suicide-completers wrote them. The same faculty experts in forensic linguistics reviewed the truthfulness and veracity of all suicide text excerpts presented and illustrated in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Since the case of suicide corpora in the Philippines is extremely a sensitive subject, the names of Filipino suicide-completers who wrote and left suicide notes were anonymized for privacy, professional, and ethical considerations. The anonymization was done by assigning dummy names on the suicide notes that reflect the actual names of the suicide-completers. The dummy names were indicated by the coding [*name*]. However, non-linguistic attributes such as age and gender were noted accordingly in the coding of the corpora for text value and reference. Further, the dates indicated in the suicide notes were filtered during coding and presentation since this detail may uncover and trace the anonymized names of the note-writers.

Results and Discussion

Linguistic oddness refers to features of a note that seems to be out of place or unnatural within its context. Shapero (2011) referred to this as an indication that something is amiss or inappropriate with the text. Further, he classified linguistic oddness into sub-categories, namely: *incorrect or inconsistent spelling, naming references, detail of phraseology, logic, vagueness, melodrama,* and *miscellaneous.*

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis on linguistic oddness in Philippine suicide notes. Notably, the most manifested category of linguistics oddness is *melodrama*. It is exhibited in 25 out of the 59 suicide notes investigated or 42.4% in corpora presence and has 38 instances or 40.4% in category frequency. *Illogic* is the second most manifested category with 13 or 22% corpora presence and 21 or 22.3% category

frequency. The third and fourth most manifested oddness are *vagueness* and *miscellaneous* with 11 or 18.6% corpora presence and 14 or 14.9% category frequency and eight or 13.6% corpora presence and 14 or 14.9% category frequency, respectively. In fifth, *naming references* occurred in four notes or 6.8% corpora presence and manifested in five instances or 5.3% category frequency. In the least occurrence, *incorrect spelling* is the sixth with two or 3.4% corpora presence and two or 2.1% category frequency. It is also noteworthy that there is no manifestation of *naming references* due to the non-availability of consistent rare noun collocations during the analyses. Overall, there were 59 suicide notes for the corpora presence and 94 oddness instances for category frequency where linguistic oddness is manifested in Philippine suicide notes.

Table 3

Linguistic Oddness in Philippine Suicide Notes

Oddness	Corpora Presence (n=59)	%	Category Frequency	%	Sample Excerpts
Melodrama	25/59	42.4	38	40.4	*this was **borne of my unending selfishness and relentless slothful nature**; Ang **pamilyang ito parang bahay-bahayan lang**.*
Illogic	13/59	22.0	21	22.3	*To my **lovely wife [Girlie]**, No matter how hard or complicated life is, you will always **find a partner**.*
Vagueness	11/59	18.6	14	14.9	*We authorize the [Yap Family] of [Rose] to take care of **everything**; Sorry sa **lahat**, sana makahanap ka ng lalaking para talaga sa'yo.*

Miscellaneous	8/59	13.6	14	14.9	*I lost all reason. I lost my reason. I lost my legal mind; I am **ashamed**, deeply ashamed, i loved, i loved, i loved to read;*
Naming References	4/59	6.8	5	5.3	*To [SSC], the **entirety of the student body**,…; [DUP] as an **institution of learning**,…; To my **lovely wife [Girlie]**; Dear **Children**:*
Incorrect Spelling	2/59	3.4	2	2.1	*surprise **mon** and dad ive known I was trans since i was 13; **Sory** kuya, ate, apo at mga pamangkin*
		Total	94	100	

Melodrama

Melodrama is an expression or statement that highlights the concept of melodrama or exhibits some characteristics of melodramatic prose. Arbeit and Blatt (1973) coined it as *embellishment* and defined it as high-flown ideas in a note that fit the concept of melodrama. In this study, the presence of *melodrama* establishes exaggeration or hyperbole concepts and prominence of emotional appeals and emphatic signals in suicide notes. Further, a *melodrama* expression is usually written through liners or phrases containing grandiloquent thoughts which may appear more or less obvious. Sample excerpts of melodrama manifested in the suicide corpora are as follows:

SNE No. 10-M-27
[*Cindy*], hope you are happy now for what you have done as you think you achieved the greatest success in your life which is to destroy me, my life, my family, my career and everything I worked for……Hope you are honest enough in telling your parents and friends that as you had achieved the

greatest award for ***being a master of manipulation and destruction***. I know you always wanted to *see the day I will crumble and fall* after I end it with you……

Mama, Papa, [*Ken*], [*Tam*], [*Sid*] and [*Julie*], I am sorry for the things I have done and ***for not being the perfect son for you and brother for you***. I know I had ***so many imperfections and inadequacies***……

SNF No. <u>10-M-26</u>

Iniwan niya ako ng walang dahilan at ***natuklasan ko na mayroon na pala siyang ibang minamahal***. Well to all my friends and family, thank you for all the support and guidance, I'm so sorry if I fail you guys for just a girl……Well thank you for all the support and everything. To my papa and mama, sorry if I fail you because of just one girl……, ***hindi man siya ang babaeng nararapat sa akin, sobra ko siyang mahal at hindi ko matatanggap kung iiwan niya ako***.

The sample excerpts are culled from the suicide notes written in English and Filipino languages and are observed to exhibit descriptions of melodrama. In SNE No. <u>10-M-27</u>, the phrase '*master of manipulation and destruction*' indicates a concept of melodrama. Here, the note-writer established an exaggerated picture of his first addressee, highlighting a severe relationship problem. Also, the phrase '*see the day I will crumble and fall*' sets an emphatic signal of resentment and bitterness as it also communicates a melodramatic effect on readers. Further, the *expression of sorry* justified by the emphatic phrases '*for not being the perfect son*' and '*so many imperfections and inadequacies*' escalate a dramatic appeal for remorse, sorrow, and even regret.

In another view, SNF No. <u>10-M-26</u> shows a melodrama associated with *love*. In the context of Filipino culture, the line '*natuklasan ko na mayroon na pala siyang ibang minamahal*' (I found out that she is in love with someone) is a typical expression for dramatic gestures which specifies facets of pity, rejection, and even misfortune. Additionally, the statement '*hindi man siya ang babaeng nararapat sa akin, sobra ko siyang mahal at*

hindi ko matatanggap kung iiwan niya ako' extends an expression of pain and the lack of self-acceptance of being rejected which gives a definite signal for a melodramatic suicide tragedy. Overtly, the presence of melodrama in the current suicide corpora is clearly described by the prominence of emotional appeals and emphatic signals established herein as confirmed by the sample excerpts presented. *(See Appendix for the full translation of suicide note excerpts written in the Filipino language to the English language)*

Illogic

Shapero (2011) described *illogic* as an incidence of illogicality where a note-writer over-specifies or gives too many details to the intended addressee, presents a statement with an illogical context, indicates concepts juxtaposition, and expresses pragmatically non-sensical point-of-views. Other examples of illogical oddness include a note saying that the note-writer was being unreasonable in killing himself and notes expressing hope that no one would be distressed or embarrassed by the suicide committed. In this study, the common illogic incidences found are over-specificity and non-sensical point-of-view. Sample excerpts of illogic oddness found in the corpora are as follows:

SNE No. 05-M-31
To my lovely wife *[Girlie]*,
No matter how hard or complicated life is, **you will always find a partner. And I hope when you find your partner, he is worth loving for.** And I now found my true place with God. I love you forever. May I rest in peace……

SNE No. 09-M-28
[Anita], I'm not sure why I'm writing this. I went online to look up information on suicide: statistics, methods and all that stuff. I was raised in a family where I went to church every Sunday and was taught the importance of faith and God in our lives. It doesn't matter. It doesn't help me……

SNE No. 03-M-29

[Michelle], I made a lot of mistakes, I was desperate, don't know what to do, I was thinking of too many things. I lost all reason. I was scared, Ma. I was scared of losing everything: family, job, respect, freedom. I chose to sell out on people who trust me. That was not me. But the desperation brought out the worst in me. I regret it. But it is too late to correct things……

The oddness found in SNE No. 05-M-31 is an illogicality related to a non-sensical point-of-view. The note-writer wrote in his salutation the word *wife* which indicates that the addressee *[Girlie]* is his wife and literally associates him as the husband. However, the intended meaning of the line '*you will always find a partner*' expressed by the note-writer devaluates the meaning of the word *wife* in the note. The devaluing was further established in the statement '*I hope when you find your partner, he is worth loving for*'. Overtly, for a husband to hint his wife to find a (new) partner in a situation perpetrated by suicide is interpretatively a non-sensical, hence, an illogic statement unconsciously established by the note-writer in his note. In Filipino culture, to say to find a new partner during or after an 'incident of death' is an insensitive and sorrowful point-of-view to take. Filipinos find it unacceptable for a husband or wife to say to look for another 'partner' in a disgraceful event of death. Suicide is already a shameful event of death in a Filipino family and to encourage a husband, wife, or partner to look for another love is too much non-sense and illogicality to comprehend for the survivors from a suicide-completer. Moreover, in Filipino society, with all the possible things to say in a suicide note (not to mention the reason(s) of suicide), it does not make sense to focus on persuading a survivor to find a new husband, wife, or partner after a death by suicide.

Similarly, a non-sensical statement is also found in SNE No. 09-M-28. Here, the line '*[Anita], I'm not sure why I'm writing this*' indicates doubt in a way that the note-writer bothered writing a note at all. Conversely, note-writer may tend or not be able to mention his reason for suicide but to say or project doubt in writing his note is odd. This notion is supported by Shapero (2011) when he postulated that some notes express doubt about committing suicide. Meanwhile, the case of SNE No. 03-M-29 through the

line '*[Michelle], I made a lot of mistakes, I was desperate, don't know what to do, I was thinking of too many things*' is an example of over-specificity as a form of *illogic*. It contained over-stated emotions of negative self-presentation, desperation, and confusion in the line '*[Michelle], I made a lot of mistakes, I was desperate, don't know what to do, I was thinking of too many things*' which are explicitly given attention by the note-writer in his note. The concept of over-specificity as a form of *illogic* was also given references by Gibbons (2003) but termed it as *over-elaboration*.

The presence of illogicality in suicide notes can be a valuable source of information in describing and understanding the state of mind of suicide-completers. Also, it may help to explain and characterize the emotional, mental, and psychological states experienced by note-writers and the motives they have before and during the act of suicide.

Vagueness

Vagueness consists of non-specific items in a suicide note. It does not explicitly refer to the lexis or words which include '*things*', '*all*', or '*everything*' but on the idea that there is no accompanying amplification or detail with it (Shapero, 2011). Sample excerpts of *vagueness* found in the corpora are illustrated as follows:

> SNE No. 14-F-21
> My dearest [*June*]
> It seems as if I have been spending all my life apologizing to you for **things** that happened whether they were my fault or not……

> SNF No. 10-M-26
> Iniwan niya ako ng walang dahilan at natuklasan ko na mayroon na pala siyang ibang minamahal. Well to all my friends and family, thank you for all the support and guidance, I'm so sorry if I fail you guys for just a girl… Well thank you for all the support and **everything**……

The word '*things*' indicates vagueness in SNE No. 14-F-21 since the note-writer failed to give any indications or references on what happened

between her and the addressee in the past and what she is apologizing for. Hence, it can be interpreted that the note-writer lacks amplification of details in the note she wrote which, as per motive, may be established intentionally or unintentionally. Similarly, the same feature of vagueness can be construed in SNF No. <u>10-M-26</u> wherein the note-writer creates an impression of imprecision and indistinctness in the note through the word '*everything*'. Therefore, with this impression, it can be interpreted that there is a phenomenon of under-elaboration of detail or information consciously or unconsciously specified by note-writers in suicide notes (Gibbons, 2003). Overall, the occurrence of *vagueness* as a form of linguistic oddness in the current corpora may pave the way in characterizing the indefiniteness and uncertainty of emotions felt by note-writers in writing suicide notes. Also, investigating vagueness may initiate significant insights in describing inconsistencies assumed in suicide notes (Olson, 2004).

Miscellaneous

Miscellaneous as a sub-category under linguistic oddness includes repetition of words or phrases and name to pronoun references (Shapero, 2011). In this study, repetition of words is observed as the most common miscellaneous form during the investigation. Further, incidences of repeatedly mentioned thoughts or ideas in the corpora are miscellaneous. Sample excerpts of miscellaneous manifested in the current corpora are shown as follows:

> SNE No. <u>03-M-29</u>
> [*Michelle*], I made a lot of mistakes, I was desperate, don't know what to do, I was thinking of too many things. *I lost all reason*. I was scared, Ma. I was scared of losing everything: family, job, respect, freedom. I chose to sell out on people who trust me. That was not me. ***But the desperation brought out the worst in me***. I regret it. But it is too late to correct things. Whichever way this goes, I'm going to be charged. I just made things worse. My mind was too confused. *I lost my*

reason. I lost my legal mind. Desperation brought out the worst in me and I'm ashamed of it……

SNE No. <u>29-F-15</u>
……*i loved* the ocean. i made glitter jar to calm myself down. *i loved* my hair and my laugh. *i loved* to act and sing. i started tumblr in 2012, roleplaying for rise of the guardians as sophie bennet. *i loved, i loved, i loved* to read……

SNF No. <u>10-M-26</u>
Iniwan niya ako ng walang dahilan at natuklasan ko na mayroon na pala siyang ibang minamahal. *Well to all my friends and family, thank you for all the support and guidance,* I'm so *sorry if I fail you guys for just a girl*……*Well thank you for all the support* and everything. To my papa and mama, *sorry if I fail you because of just one girl*……

The oddness manifested in SNE No. <u>03-M-29</u> is an example of word repetition and, in general, a repetition of thoughts expressed in a suicide note. Here, two thoughts are repeatedly expressed. First is the loss of (legal) reasoning as expressed in the lines '*I lost all reason, I lost my reason, I lost my legal mind*' while the second is the act of desperation conveyed by the note-writer in '*But the desperation brought out the worst in me*' and '*Desperation brought out the worst in me*'. It can be deduced that the note-writers tend to repeat words and thoughts to impose and stress emphasis on the emotions and feelings they want to convey explicitly in their suicide notes. Also, repeated words and thoughts allow note-writers to form their *escalated justifications* in a way they want their addressee to understand their emotions, particularly the suicide committed.

Likewise, a similar concept of repetition is found in SNE No. <u>29-F-15</u>, but this time connected to love. In the example, the phrase '*i love*' is consistently expressed in six incidences. However, the most distinctive repetition is viewed in the line '*i loved, i loved, i loved to read*'. From this line, it can be construed that the note-writer has a strong fondness for reading. This type of miscellaneous is not a concept of escalated justification but rather a declaration of information that she wants her

addressees to remember despite the suicide being committed. Hence, unlike the case of the first example, repetitions as the position of miscellaneous can also be taken as a way of providing information involved in writing suicide notes.

There is also an instance in the current corpora where the note-writer failed to use an appropriate pronoun referring to his addressee. This instance is considered odd and taken as miscellaneous in this study. The note is provided as follows:

> SNE No. 20-M-26
> I hated you [Joyce] thoroughly and deeply from the instant. *[Joyce]* told me what **he** had done. I'm tired. There must be something fine for her. I hope she'll find the right person.

The note-writer in SNE No. 20-M-26 mistakenly indicated the pronoun '*he*' while referring to her *female* addressee in the sentence '*[Joyce] told me what he had done*'. In this study, a glitch in name to pronoun references is considered as a form miscellaneous and a significant indicator of oddness in suicide notes. Further, this can be foreseen as part of the inconsistencies in suicide notes, which may color the discourse of suicide from a diverse perspective (Olson, 2005). In summary, the presence of miscellaneous as an indicator of oddness in suicide notes enables note-writers to emphasize the emotions they want to convey, provide information about themselves, and display their emotional and psychological states before and during the act of suicide.

Naming References

In his oddness framework, Shapero (2011) described *naming references* as the category that constitutes awkwardness to reference of names and roles and is largely dependent upon the role of the addressee. To illustrate this type of oddness, sample excerpts are demonstrated as follows:

> SNE No. 02-M-22
> To *[SSC], the entirety of the student body*, especially the graduating cohort, my parents, and

to **[DUP] *as an institution of learning*,** Words are inadequate at this moment but they are all I have at this point……

To my ***lovely wife [Girlie]*,**
No matter how hard or complicated life is, you will always find a partner. And I hope when you find your partner, he is worth loving for……

***Dear [Marie]*,**
For 23 years we lived happy together. Our married life was ideal,……
***Dear Children*:**
Please forgive me.
Love...[*Vin*] 3/26/20xx

The manifestation of oddness in naming references occurred only in suicide notes written in the English language. In SNE No. 02-M-22, the descriptive extensions '*the entirety of the student body*' for addressee '*[SSC]*' and '*an institution of learning*' for the addressee '*[DUP]*' are perceived as odd elements. To take these in a context, the note-writer's addressees would obviously know, with their background knowledge, the references of '*[SSC]*' and '*[DUP]*' in the note. Hence, to include descriptive extensions to what they already stand for is redundant, awkward, and over-specific. Also, to give this kind of reference displays oddness for readers, contextualizing that they know already what these entities stand for. This kind of oddness can be viewed as associated with the note-writer's act of over-elaboration and over-familiarity of information given to the addressees.

On the other end, to mention the role and name of an addressee (both name and role is referred to one addressee only) in a salutation is also odd. This is the case of SNE No. 05-M-31. Here, the note-writer indicated the role and name of his partner as the addressee of his note. This is odd in the context of naming references since, as common knowledge, the addressee already knows her role, that is, the wife of the note-writer. Arbeit and Blatt (1973) also found this oddness in naming

references in their study and purported that, although naturally occurring in genuine notes, many references of oddness in names and roles were found in simulated notes.

Meanwhile, the oddness found in SNE No. <u>12-M-52</u> is also focused on a salutation. It is observed that the note-writer specified two salutations in the note. These are '*Dear [Marie]*' and '*Dear Children*'. Indicating '*Dear [Marie]*' stipulates no oddness since the note-writer tended to write the name of '*[Marie]*' which can be deduced as his wife based on the text body of the note. However, oddness occurred when the note-writer indicated another salutation and specified the role '*children*' in it. This is because the note-writer failed to give familiarity on the names of his children. Overtly, for a father not to specify the names of his children in his note seems to be an unlikely character. Further, it does not establish the root of the filial relationship a father has with his children and may sound impersonal to the addressees. Hence, the non-specification of names in salutations is considered odd in this study. This notion is also true in the study of Shapero (2011) when he propounded that salutation by role generates awkward references which can be relatively treated as oddness in suicide notes. Ultimately, the occurrence of naming references as oddness in suicide notes describes the type of relationship a note-writer has established to his or her addressee(s).

Incorrect or Inconsistent Spelling

Incorrect or inconsistent spelling indicates that something is amiss with the text (Shapero, 2011). This oddness may assume misspelled or inconsistent spellings of family members, relatives, or friends or simply words commonly used daily. In this study, there are only two incidences of incorrect spelling and these are presented as follows:

> SNE No. <u>29-F-15</u>
> ……my name was [*julie loraine buena*] and my gender neutral name was lee. i was 15, assigned female at birth, and i dentified as nonbinary (surprise **mon** and dad ive known I was trans since i was 13). panromantic, demisexual, as of this moment, so yes dad i made out with a girl……

SNF No. 11-M-27
Hindi kita mapapatawad, dadalawin kita
habambuhay [*Maris*]! Mag-aaply ako ng trabaho
para sayo, ano ginawa mo?......
Niloko niya ako mama kaya ko nagawa ito. ***Sory***
kuya, ate, apo at mga pamangkin

The incorrect spelling in SNE No. 29-F-15 is found in the line '*surprise mon and dad ive known I was trans since i was 13*' in which the word '*mom*' is misspelled as '*mon*'. Generally, it can be seen as a common typographical error since SNE No. 29-F-15 is a suicide note that was written and posted on a social media site. However, for this study, it is still considered incorrect spelling because it is the only misspelled word in the suicide note. And by being inconsistent, '*mon*' posits the concept of oddness. Likewise, the case of SNF No. 11-M-27 is odd in terms of spelling. It can be seen in the sentence '*Sory kuya, ate, apo at mga pamangkin*' wherein the word '*sorry*' is spelled with one letter '*r*' only, '*sory*'. Although it can be trans-literally accepted since the note is widely written in the Filipino language, '*sory*' still generates a sense of awkwardness when read in the note. Also, compared to other words, *sorry* is a common word used and heard on a day-to-day basis. It would be ideal if the note-writer should have at least opted to use the word '*patawad*', the equivalent word of '*sorry*' in the Filipino language, in his suicide note to avoid oddness in spelling.

One major factor seen in the non-presence of detail of phraseology is the non-availability of consistent rare noun collocations in the suicide notes analyzed. Although Shapero (2011) described it as oddness in the use of nouns preceded by the definite article 'the', detail of phraseology is not manifested in the current corpora. Hence, it is not described and given interpretations in this study.

Conclusion

Filipino suicide-completers hovered their suicide notes with melodramatic emotions, inconsistencies in logic and naming references, incorrect spellings, the vagueness of details, and repetition of overly stated thoughts or ideas. These occluded features projected awkwardness,

inappropriateness, and oddness in the suicide structure which may distinguish and highlight the characteristics of genuine suicide notes. Finally, as far as linguistic oddness is concerned, Filipino suicide-completers composed their notes with emotional appeals and emphatic signals containing obvious grandiloquent thoughts of remorse, sorrow, regret, bitterness, and resentment. This implicates Filipinos' emotional and dramatic culture even in the brink of suicide.

The examination of linguistic oddness in this study offers valuable insights in establishing the genuineness of a disputed suicide note in the Philippines' current practice of fraud analysis. The analysis carried typifies the suicide notes in terms of oddness, an important characteristic that can be investigated to evaluate the veracity of any suicide notes and other disputed texts. This study also provides alternative paradigms of characterizing the conventional and unconventional patterns of suicide notes as far as oddness features are concerned using linguistic research methodologies. Moreover, the framework used in this investigation is a good addition to the existing discourse analysis methods. The framework of oddness can be utilized to analyze other genres and text types through the lens of linguistic research. Finally, future endeavors on suicide may embark on larger Filipino suicide corpora for a broader scope and interpretation of linguistic oddness, characterize the language of gender in terms of oddness in suicide notes, typify the characteristics of oddness between English and Filipino-written suicide notes, and distinguish oddness similarities and differences of suicide notes written by suicide-completers and attempters in the Philippines.

Limitations

Some limitations are important to be accounted for in this study. The first limitation is related to the corpora examined in this study. The 59 suicide notes investigated may be small. As a consequence, the findings of this study may not be entirely generalizable to describe the phenomenon of linguistic oddness present in Philippine suicide notes. However, the results and findings suggest patterns and means of investigating linguistic oddness in suicide notes through the lens of linguistic methodologies. With this, future studies on the same niche may include a wider scope of suicide notes coming from multiple sources and diverse groups of Filipino suicide-completers. Meanwhile, the second limitation is accounted to the analysis

framework employed in this study. Shapero's (2011) Framework for Linguistic Oddness may be limited in terms of identifying, capturing, and describing other unique and distinct oddness features that hovered in Philippine suicide notes. Nevertheless, the findings and interpretations yielded are good starting points to explain the occurrence of linguistic oddness in genuine suicide notes for this pilot forensic discourse-based study in the Philippines.

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Appendix

English Translation of the Suicide Notes Written in Filipino/Cebuano

SNF No. <u>10-M-26</u>

She left without reason and I found out that she is in love with someone. Well to all my friends and family, thank you for all the support and guidance, I'm so sorry if I fail you guys for just a girl... Well thank you for all the support and everything. To my papa and mama, sorry if I fail you because of just one girl..., even though she is not the right girl for me, I love her so much and I cannot accept if she'll leave me.

SNF No. <u>11-M-27</u>

I will never forgive you, I will haunt you forever [Maris]. I am going to apply for a job for you, but what did you do? I went to your place then only to find out that you were with someone else,
She cheated on me mama which resolved me to do this. Sorry brother, sister, grandparent, and nieces/nephews.