

A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS ANALYSIS OF SUICIDE NOTES IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study explores Indonesian suicide notes informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze how final experiences are linguistically constructed. Drawing on a corpus of 11 Indonesian suicide notes (containing 130 clauses) compiled from digital news archives between 2023 and 2025, the research analyzed how grammar functions ideationally, interpersonally, and textually. The findings show that Relational processes (38.3%) and Mental processes (20.0%) dominate the texts. This proves that the notes focus heavily on internal feelings and self-definition rather than external actions. In contrast, Material processes make up 25.0% of the data and shift behavior based on the recipient, acting as practical task instructions. Interpersonally, the notes rely on a mix of Declarative statements (74.6%) and Imperative commands (19.2%) to pass emotional and practical duties onto survivors. Textually, the heavy use of first-person pronouns as the sentence-starting Topical Theme (74.8%) keeps the author at the center and forces the reader to see the tragedy entirely through their eyes. This study demonstrates that these notes operate as complex tools for meaning-making rather than simple emotional outbursts. Finally, the paper concludes by detailing how these results contribute practically to forensic linguistics for text verification and to psychological counseling for spotting critical language warning signs of deep mental distress.

Keywords: Mood analysis, suicide notes, systemic functional linguistics, textual theme transitivity

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a complex global phenomenon with profound social and psychological implications. The World Health Organization (WHO) (World Health Organization, 2025) reports that more than 727,000 people died by suicide in 2021, making it the fourth leading cause of death among the 15–29 age group. Globally, this phenomenon not only affects productive age groups but also highlights sharp economic disparities, with more than 70% of cases occurring in low- and middle-income countries (World Health Organization, 2025). In Indonesia, this trend shows an alarming escalation. According to a report by the National Criminal Information Center of the Indonesian National Police, during the January to August 2024 period, 849 suicide cases were recorded out of a total of 8,393 public disturbance cases, making it the fourth highest case category handled by the police (PUSIKNAS POLRI, 2024). This trend continued into the following year, where from January 1 to May 28, 2025, nearly 600 suicide cases were recorded, with the highest prevalence found in the Central Java and East Java regions. WHO data (2021) It informs us that there were at least 3,333 lives lost to suicide in Indonesia (World Health Organization, 2025).

This phenomenon leaves behind functional artifacts in the form of final messages or suicide notes. These notes are not merely emotional outbursts, but rather strategic instruments designed to negotiate meaning, responsibility, and the author's final instructions to those left behind. These texts can guide us to understand what is going on with their final cognitive state (Ho, Yip, Chiu & Halliday, 1998; Leenaars, 1988). From the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), these notes can be reconceptualized as strategic tools to negotiate meaning, assign responsibility, and deliver final mandates (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Tahir & Jahir, 2025).

Indonesian researchers argued that a suicide note is a social transaction embedded in cultural presuppositions (Tahir & Jahir, 2025; Widiatmika, Pastika & Satyawati., 2024). The breadth and depth of the trend characterize the previous research. The suicide note research has been influenced by Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Deep Learning focusing on careful accuracy in risk detection (Gorai & Shaw, 2024; Zhang, Schoene & Ananiadou, 2021). Despite the successful identification of suicide text, these methods fail to elaborate on the identity and meaning identification in micro linguistics (Young, Bishop, Humphrey & Pavlacic, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap by employing three metafunctions of language to deconstruct the language of finality.

This study employs Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that reconceptualizes language as a social semiotic system for making meaning within a specific context of culture and situation (Halliday, 1978, 1985;

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Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013). Within this framework, language is understood as a functional tool to satisfy human communicative purposes in social settings (Ghani et al., 2022; Halliday, 1978, 2000; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Herman et al., 2022). SFL views every instance of language use, or **text**, as an artifact representing three simultaneous meanings, known as metafunctions (Halliday, 1978, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013).

The ideational metafunction interprets and constructs human experience. It functions as a grammar of experience that models how events flow in both our internal minds and the external world (Halliday, 1978, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013; Mushtaq et al., 2021). Ideational metafunction is realized through the System of Transitivity, which breaks down experience into specific configurations of Processes (verbs), Participants (nouns), and Circumstances (adverbs or prepositions) (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1978, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013). SFL identifies six types of processes: (1) Material: actions, doings, and happenings, (2) Mental: sensing, feeling, and consciousness, (3) Relational: being, identity, and possession, (3) Verbal: saying and communicating, (4) Behavioral: physiological and psychological behaviors, (5) Existential: stating that something exists.

Within ideational metafunction, the Participant is determined by the Process type, for example, an **Actor** in material processes or a **Senser** in mental processes. In the specific purposes of the text, authors may use grammatical metaphor (nominalization) (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013), including the suicide notes, when the authors turn dynamic verbs into static nouns, the author transforms an active process into a stable thing. Consequently, this linguistic choice allows writers to present their internal suffering not as a passing emotion, but as a fixed, unarguable reality.

The interpersonal metafunction treats the clause as an exchange, establishing personal and social relationships between speakers and listeners (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013). Language functions here as an active tool to either give or demand information (propositions) or goods-and-services (proposals). Interpersonal metafunction is realized through the Mood element, which consists of the Subject and the Finite. The Subject acts as the warranty of the exchange, which is the specific element that the speaker holds responsible for the validity of the claim (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Grammatical choices within the Mood system realize fundamental semantic speech functions, including Statements, Questions, Offers, and Commands (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013). In final declarations or crisis texts, writers often transition structurally from declarative justifications to imperative commands. This strategic linguistic shift is used by authors to lock in the survivor's future behavior and direct their actions after the writer is gone (Lubis et al., 2024; Sueb & Wafa, 2025).

The textual metafunction acts as an enabling mechanism that organizes ideational and interpersonal meanings into a coherent text (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). This function ensures that a text hangs together structurally and remains relevant to its communicative context. Within interpersonal metafunction, the clause has two elements: the Theme and the Rheme. The Theme serves as the message's point of departure that functions as the structural anchor. It locates and orients the entire clause.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) categorizes Theme into three types. First, Topical Themes provide the experiential grounding of the clause (such as Participant, Process, and Circumstance). When a Participant (subject) of a clause is the Theme, it is called as unmarked Topical Theme while when Process (verbs) or Circumstance (adverbs) is the Theme of a clause is categorized as marked Topical Theme. Second, Interpersonal Themes signal the tenor of the exchange (such as vocatives). Third, Textual Themes manage the discourse flow (such as conjunctions) (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013).

Suicide notes have been widely studied as critical texts that reveal the author's inner reasoning and rhetorical strategies prior to the act. Early work demonstrated that these notes attempt to persuade readers of the justifiability of suicide, functioning as persuasive discourse rather than mere confessions (Ho et al., 1998; Leenaars, 1988). Traditional forensic approaches, however, often treat suicide notes as straightforward indicators of intent, overlooking their semiotic complexity. In contrast, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a deeper lens, showing how authors negotiate meaning, assign responsibility, and deliver final mandates through language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Recent studies in Indonesia have begun to explore suicide notes through forensic pragmatic autopsies (Tahir & Jährir, 2025; Widiatmika et al., 2024). Yet, these studies remain fragmented and have not integrated SFL's metafunctional framework.

Within collectivist Asian contexts, cultural values such as Rukun (social harmony) profoundly shape how guilt, farewell, and responsibility are expressed (Wong et al., 2022). Suicide notes thus emerge as complex social transactions embedded in cultural presuppositions. Yet, despite this cultural dimension, much of the scholarship remains Western-centric, limiting its explanatory power in Asian settings (Roemling & Busso, 2026).

From an ideational perspective, suicide notes consistently reveal an inner-world orientation. Studies confirm the dominance of Mental processes that express suffering and Relational processes that signal distorted identity (Sujatna, Sujatna, Pamungkas & Saefullah, 2024). Their findings are in contrast to public and professional

discourses, where Material processes are more prominent. For instance, UNGA addresses (Mushtaq et al., 2021), newspaper editorials (Ghani et al., 2022), Instagram campaigns on mental health awareness (Anake, Chimuanya, & Ogbulogo, 2025), and discourses on successful women's public identities (Khalil, 2024). The Material processes in these discourses foreground agency and action. However, exceptions arise in ideological texts such as jihadist discourse, where Material processes dominate to issue mandates and mobilize followers (Gunawan et al., 2023). Despite the insights of the highlights of inner world orientation, there remains a critical gap in explaining how gender and addressee identity condition transitivity patterns in suicide notes.

In the light of interpersonal metafunction, the suicide note author might shift from using declarative justifications to imperative commands to direct survivors' future behavior (Herman, Saputra, Ngongo & Fatmawati, 2022). This negotiation can be mediated by cultural contexts, where traditional concepts of authority shape modal choices and legitimacy (Sueb & Wafa, 2025). Lubis et al. (2024) further show how imperative structures transfer modal responsibility to survivors. This is done to predetermine their actions and embed obligations within the farewell discourse. Such findings underscore the need to explore how interpersonal strategies redistribute responsibility in culturally specific ways.

The textual metafunction concerns how authors organize meaning through Theme-Rheme structures. Halliday (2000) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2013) define Theme as the point of departure in a clause, and suicide notes consistently mark the self ("I") as the unmarked Topical Theme. Computational studies confirm the dominance of first-person pronouns (Homan et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021), but they often ignore Theme-Rheme organization. Trauma discourse research demonstrates that lexicogrammatical choices reflect psychological disorientation (Alruwaili et al., 2025), yet Natural Language Processing (NLP) models remain reductionist, focusing on word frequency rather than micro-level meaning negotiation (Young et al., 2023). This methodological limitation further illustrates the need for metafunctional analysis.

Taken together, these strands of research reveal both the richness and the limitations of current scholarship. While suicide notes have been studied ideationally, interpersonally, and textually, gaps remain in accounting for gender, addressee identity, and cultural mediation. Moreover, much of the work remains Western-centric, overlooking collectivist values such as *rukun* that shape meaning in Indonesian contexts. Against this backdrop, the present study applies SFL's three metafunctional principles to Indonesian suicide notes. By doing so, it positions them as strategic semiotic instruments that negotiate meaning, redistribute responsibility, and organize discourse within culturally embedded frameworks.

Research Questions

Rather than focusing on simple word-frequency detection and being too western-centric (Roemling & Busso, 2026), this study moves to provide a functional grammar of suicidal discourse by investigating three core Research Questions:

1. Ideational: How do Transitivity patterns vary by gender and addressee to represent the author's final reality?
2. Interpersonal: How is the Mood system used to negotiate relationships and express demands on the readers?
3. Textual: How do Thematic choices create coherence and frame the author's centrality in the suicide notes?

Limitations of the Study

To establish clear boundaries for this analysis, three core limitations are acknowledged:

1. Sample Size: This study targets a focused, micro-level collection of texts (N = 11 notes, 130 clauses). While this small dataset allows for a deep manual analysis of subtle grammatical choices, the findings indicate specific patterns rather than statistical representation across all cases.
2. Language Mix: The analyzed corpus features a mix of Indonesian, Javanese, and Sundanese. This study observes these texts together, leaving the isolated tracking of single-language nuances and unique dialect patterns for future investigation.
3. Text Types: The scope is strictly limited to personal suicide notes. It explicitly excludes any comparative analysis with ideological testaments, fake messages, or staged texts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design supported by quantitative analysis. The primary methodological framework is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 2013), which views language as a dynamic resource for making meaning rather than a rigid set of rules.

This framework is selected because it enables a detailed dissection of the functional properties of language, specifically, how grammar constructs reality (Ideational), enacts social relationships (Interpersonal), and organizes information (Textual). While the core analysis remains qualitative and interpretive, simple descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages) are utilized to identify dominant linguistic patterns across the variables of gender and intended addressee.

Data Source and Corpus

This study analyzes a corpus of 11 authentic Indonesian suicide notes (N=11) compiled from digital media archives between 2023 and 2025. To ensure analytical validity, these texts were selected based on three primary requirements: textual completeness, contextual clarity, and public accessibility. First, each note had to be entirely legible and preserved in its complete or near-complete form despite its digital dissemination across online media. To ensure data integrity, the text of each note was cross-verified by comparing versions published across multiple independent portals, guaranteeing that the linguistic data remained consistent and free from editorial alterations.

Second, the author's basic demographic data, specifically gender and age, along with the identity of the intended recipient, had to be clearly identifiable. Finally, the notes had to be accessible via public media archives to allow for independent academic verification.

Table 1 provides the information about the 11 suicide notes, which provide a unique look into final communications within the Indonesian cultural context, focusing on authors aged 20 to 34. Although a gender imbalance exists, with female authors accounting for 81.8% of the data, the notes offer critical qualitative insights into this specific demographic. Reflecting Indonesia's highly multilingual landscape, the texts exhibit significant linguistic variation, including the use of Indonesian, Javanese, Sundanese, English, and instances of code-switching. In terms of readership, these messages are primarily directed toward intimate addressees, such as mothers, parents, romantic partners, or children, whereas only a few target the general public.

Table 1. Overview of corpus of suicide notes in Indonesia's context

Text #	Writer's Initial/Age/Gender	Primary Audience	Original Language(s)	Total Clauses Analyzed
Text 1	IRW/24/Male	Mother	Javanese	4
Text 2	NJW/20/Female	Mother	English/Indonesian	13
Text 3	EB/24/Female	Parents	Indonesian	7
Text 4	EB/24/Female	Best Friend/Partner	Indonesian	4
Text 5	EB/24/Female	General Public/Friends	Indonesian	5
Text 6	BCA/21/Female	Mother	English	12
Text 7	BCA/21/Female	Siblings/The World	English	12
Text 8	BCA/21/Female	Best Friend/The World	English/Indonesian	18
Text 9	RR/28/Male	General Public/Mr. Bobby	Indonesian	14
Text 10	EN/34/Female	Family/The World	Sundanese	26
Text 11	EN/34/Female	Children (Asep & Cucu)	Sundanese	14
TOTAL				129

Unit of Analysis

In accordance with SFL frameworks, the primary unit of analysis for this study is the clause. The clause was selected because it represents the fundamental grammatical unit where the three metafunctions, ideational (Transitivity), interpersonal (Mood), and textual (Theme & ReHEME), are simultaneously realized (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). For the coding process, clause simplexes were analyzed as independent, single units. Conversely, clause complexes were segmented into their individual constituent ranking clauses based on their paratactic or hypotactic relationships. Finally, minor clauses, including fragments, vocatives (such as "Ma! /Mom!"), and formulaic expressions were carefully retained for interpersonal mood analysis, but they were excluded from the transitivity matrix whenever a structural process was absent.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

The analytical workflow for this study was executed across four distinct, systematic phases to ensure a rigorous integration of qualitative interpretation and descriptive statistics.

First, all 11 suicide notes were transcribed verbatim in their original languages. Because the corpus includes Javanese and Sundanese texts, a functional translation method was applied. Interlinear English glossing was deployed for local regional terms to ensure accurate grammatical tracking. For instance, the Javanese term

sepurane was not merely translated as the lexical item “sorry,” but was structurally glossed to capture its interpersonal value as a minor clause functioning as a plea for forgiveness.

Second, the text was segmented into individual ranking clauses and manually coded across Halliday’s three SFL strata. The ideational analysis mapped transitivity patterns by categorizing Process types (Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Existential), Participant roles, and Circumstances. The interpersonal analysis identified the Mood Block (Subject + Finite) and residue to map speech functions and modality. Finally, the textual analysis isolated the topical, interpersonal, and textual Themes to determine the overall method of development.

Next, once coded, the linguistic data were quantified using descriptive statistics to calculate the distribution and density of specific features. Frequencies and percentages were tabulated to map individual text distributions (Texts 1–11) and then cross-examined across the primary research variables: gender groups (male versus female patterns) and addressee groups (intimate family versus public/non-family recipients).

Finally, the quantitative distributions were interpreted qualitatively to uncover the deeper socio-psychological motivations of the authors. This phase synthesized the data to reveal how specific lexicogrammatical surges, such as a high concentration of Relational Processes or imperative shifts, realized critical communicative goals like moral absolution, guilt negotiation, and social control within the distinct collectivist framework of Indonesian culture.

Research Instruments

In accordance with qualitative research paradigms, the primary analytical instrument for this study was the researchers, who executed the linguistic coding using a structured annotation scheme based on (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2013) Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. To maintain absolute consistency and precision across the entire corpus of 114 ranking clauses, a specialized tabular coding matrix was developed. This matrix functioned as a secondary instrument, tracking and mapping every clause against its corresponding ideational, interpersonal, and textual variables.

Data Quality and Authenticity

This study establishes data quality using the authenticity and trustworthiness standards outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994). Because SFL text analysis involves a transactional relationship between the researcher and the semiotic data, structural measures were enforced to ensure fairness and analytical dependability. First, to minimize analytical subjectivity and ensure internal consistency, a dual-session coding process was performed on the same dataset at two separate intervals.

Second, to eliminate short-term memory bias and prevent stylistic habituation, a strict two-week incubation period of temporal detachment was enforced between the first and second coding cycles. This pause allowed for a highly reflexive and disciplined secondary review of the 114 clauses.

Finally, any coding discrepancies or ambiguities identified between the two analytical sessions were resolved through a formal peer debriefing process involving an external SFL expert. This collaborative reconciliation ensured that the final linguistic classifications remained theoretically sound, satisfying Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) emphasis on utilizing the critical community to cross-examine and validate qualitative insights.

FINDINGS

Realization of the Ideational Metafunction

Table 2. Overview of Types of Processes (Texts 1–11)

Type of Processes	Type of Participants	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11	Total	%
Relational	Carrier, Attribute, Token, Value, Possessor, Possessed	2	4	3	0	1	5	6	6	3	11	5	46	38.3
Material	Actor, Goal, Scope (Range), Recipient, Client	0	4	0	3	0	3	3	6	4	4	3	30	25.0
Mental	Senser, Phenomenon	0	3	3	1	2	2	2	6	1	3	1	24	20.0
Verbal	Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage, Target	2	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	6	3	4	19	15.0
Existential	Existent	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1.7
TOTAL		4	12	8	4	4	11	11	18	14	22	13	121	100

Table 2 provides information about the Transitivity analysis, revealing a corpus heavily weighted toward internal experience rather than external action. Relational processes (34.8%) and Mental processes (22.6%) dominate the data, accounting for a combined 57.4% of all process types. This distribution indicates that the primary function of the genre is self-definition and emotional justification, describing who the author “is” or how they “feel”, rather than recounting physical events. The following narrative provides a rigorous SFL analysis of the selected corpus of 11 suicide notes from Indonesia, comprising 129 total clauses. The authors, aged 20 to 34, utilized a multilingual repertoire of Indonesian, Javanese, Sundanese, and English to convey their final messages to family, friends, and the public.

Relational processes (38.3%, n=46) predominate the corpus, functioning primarily to characterize the authors' final identity and state of being. Within this domain, *Attributive* configurations signal profound emotional and physical exhaustion, as illustrated in the Sundanese phrase “*Abi tos cape lalampahan*” (I am already tired of the journey) [Data 10.c3] and the English assertion “*I’m weak*” [Data 8.c6]. Concurrently, Possessive relational processes are deployed to map the status of final social bonds, either affirming an enduring connection—such as “*I have a birthday gift for you*” [Data 2.c3]—or explicitly absolving survivors of guilt or obligation, as seen in “*Aa Cucu mah can gaduh dosa*” (You both [Asep and Cucu] have no sins) [Data 11.c8]. Transitioning from these static states of being to active events, material processes (25.0%, n=30) capture a distinct tension between the physical relinquishment of agency, exemplified by “*aku nyerah*” (I give up) [Data 2.c13] and “*I can give it to you myself*” [Data 2.c6], and the imposition of urgent post-mortem directives on survivors, such as “*Mulailah hidup baru dengan Bahagia*” (Start a new life happily) [Data 4.c4] or “*just kill me*” [Data 8.c15].

Mirroring these physical transitions, mental processes (20.0%, n=24) map the internal consciousness of the sender, shifting from hopeless cognitive reflections regarding the future, such as “*I see no future for me*” [Data 6.c7] and the Sundanese “*abi tos bosen ngadagoan hirup kieu*” (I am already bored waiting for life like this) [Data 10.c4] to final projections of desideration and enduring affection (“*I wish*” [Data 2.c5]; “*I love you*” [Data 7.c9]). This internal suffering is further externalized through verbal processes (15.0%, n=19), which are primarily leveraged to negotiate interpersonal reconciliation and moral absolution. These manifest either as final apologies like the Javanese “*Sepurane aku mak*” (Forgive me, Mom) [Data 1.c4] and “*I’m not blaming you*” [Data 6.c10], or as retrospective causal explanations for the tragic event (“*hampura abdi nyababkeun kitu*” (forgive me for causing this) [Data 10.c2]). Finally, existential processes (1.7%, n=2) establish the structural boundaries of the text by acknowledging overwhelming trauma that resists simple linguistic coding. By introducing clauses “*ada banyak rasa sakit yang tidak bisa diceritakan*” (there is much pain that cannot be told) [Data 3.c7], the authors position their unutterable suffering as an independent, inescapable reality that frames their final departure.

The analysis also demonstrates that gender significantly influences how authors linguistically frame their crisis. Due to the female-dominated nature of the corpus (81.8%), the text prominently reflects a female tendency to privilege the inner world, utilizing mental and relational processes to negotiate emotions and existential rationales. For instance, in Data 6, the author maps her internal conflict through cognitive reflections like “*I see no future for me*” [Data 6.c7] and “*I know how much you love me*” [Data 6.c8], a pattern mirrored in the regional languages via the Sundanese attributive state “*Abi tos cape lalampahan*” (I am already tired of the journey) [Data 10.c3] and the affective stance “*teu ridho*” (not willing) [Data 11.c10]. Conversely, male authors exhibit an experiential shift determined by their specific communicative objectives. While some male texts leverage verbal and relational systems to seek familial absolution, such as the Javanese pleas “*Sepurane aku mak*” (Forgive me, Mom) [Data 1.c4] and “*dadi bebane make*” (being mom’s burden) [Data 1.c3], others prioritize practical mandates. In Data 9, the note operates as a transactional handover, utilizing material processes to manage logistical parameters rather than emotional release, explicitly directing “*tolong bayar utang aku*” (please pay my debt) [Data 9.c3] and “*cukup makamkan aku selayaknya*” (just bury me properly) [Data 9.c9].

This functional variation is further driven by the identity of the addressee, which splits the texts into either vehicles for moral absolution or instruments for practical mandates. Notes directed at family members heavily feature processes that establish a moral hierarchy or seek interpersonal reconciliation. This is evident when the author in Data 1 relies on the verbal clause “*wes ngerepoti make*” (for always troubling you) [Data 1.c2] and the relational attribute “*dadi bebane make*” (being mom’s burden) [Data 1.c3] to assume structural liability. Similarly, in the Sundanese text addressed to her children [Data 11], the author uses a possessive relational process to absolve the recipients (“*Aa Cucu mah can gaduh dosa*” / You both [Asep and Cucu] have no sins [Data 11.c8]) before deploying a material process to take full spiritual responsibility (“*keun wé mamah nu nangtung dosa-na*” / let Mama bear all the sins herself [Data 11.c9]). In stark contrast, notes addressed to acquaintances or the public discard these emotional and moral repairs, adopting a transactional, administrative tone. As demonstrated in Data 9, material processes dominate to delegate concrete tasks, transforming the discourse into a series of logistical directives: “*tolong bayar utang aku*” (please pay my debt) [Data 9.c3] and “*cukup makamkan aku selayaknya*” (just bury me properly) [Data 9.c9].

Realization of the Interpersonal Metafunction

The interpersonal analysis of the corpus reveals a structural tension between the Declarative mood (74.6%, n=97), used to assert final realities, and the Imperative mood (19.2%, n=25), deployed to project final mandates. As seen in Table 3, the dominant Declarative mood serves as the primary linguistic vehicle for *Statements*, enabling authors to validate their internal states, establish existential justifications, and preserve interpersonal bonds before their departure. This manifests as direct self-definitions of exhaustion (“*aku nyerah*” / I give up [Data 2.c13]; “*I’m weak*” [Data 8.c6]), explicit causal rationales (“*Aku capek hidup di dunia ini*” / I am tired of living in this world [Data 5.c5]; Sundanese “*Abi tos bosen ngadagoan hirup kieu*” / I am already bored waiting for life like this [Data 10.c4]), and final assurances of affection (“*Eca sayang mamah, ayah, dan semuanya*” / Eca loves Mom, Dad, and everyone [Data 3.c4]; “*I love you*” [Data 7.c9]). Complementing these statements, minor clauses and vocatives (5.4%, n=7) operate outside standard mood structures to establish a deeply personal *Tenor*. Whether framing the communication through intimate textual openings (“*Dear Mom*” [Data 6.c1]; “*Dear best friend*” [Data 8.c1]; Sundanese “*Aa Asep, Cucu nya talina*” / Dear Aa Asep and Cucu [Data 11.c1]) or urgent existential calls (“*Mak*” / Mom [Data 1.c1]), these elements emotionally prime the reader and anchor the text within specific relational constraints.

Table 3. Distribution of Mood Types (Texts 1–11)

Mood Type/Speech Function	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11	Total	%
Declarative/Statement	0	11	5	2	3	11	11	16	7	23	8	97	74.6
Imperative/Command	3	1	2	2	2	0	0	1	7	2	5	25	19.2
Vocative / Fragment	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	7	5.4
Question	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.8
Total Clauses	4	13	7	4	5	12	12	19	14	26	14	130	100%

This interactive dynamic becomes highly polarized within the Imperative mood, where the communicative force of commands shifts dramatically based on the target addressee. When writing to family members, imperatives function as moral appeals for forgiveness. Because the SFL subject of a command is the entity responsible for its execution, clauses like the Javanese “*Sepurane aku mak*” (Forgive me, Mom) [Data 1.c4] or the Sundanese “*hampura abdi nyababkeun kitu*” (forgive me for causing this) [Data 10.c2] shift the structural burden of action entirely onto the survivor. Embedded within local cultural values such as *Rukun* (social harmony), these appeals create immense interpersonal pressure, framing absolution as a cultural obligation. Conversely, when notes are directed toward acquaintances or the general public, the tone shifts to an instrumental mandate focused on task completion and administrative handovers. In these scenarios, the interpersonal distance increases; commands are either mitigated using polite markers (“*tolong bayar utang aku*” / please pay my debt [Data 9.c3]) or structured as direct logistical instructions regarding physical arrangements (“*cukup makamkan aku selayaknya*” / just bury me properly [Data 9.c9]), treating the recipient as a functional executor rather than a source of moral healing.

Realization of the Textual Metafunction

Table 4. Distribution of Theme Types (Texts 1–11)

ThemeType	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11	Total	%
Topical (Participant/Process)	3	12	7	4	5	11	11	17	14	25	13	122	74.8%
Interpersonal (Vocative/Adjunct)	1	4	2	1	0	1	1	2	4	3	6	25	15.3%
Textual (Conjunction/Binder)	3	2	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	6	0	16	9.8%
Total Themes	7	18	10	5	5	14	12	21	18	34	19	163	100%

The text exhibits a strong orientation toward author centrality, driven by a heavy reliance on unmarked Topical Themes (74.8%, n = 122). By consistently placing first-person pronouns—such as “*I*”, “*Aku*”, the Sundanese “*Abi*”, or self-referential names like “*Eca*”—in the clause-initial position, the writers construct an inward-focused monologue. Their individual agency and psychological crisis form the primary lens through which the text develops, as seen in the Sundanese clause “*Abi tos cape lalampahan*” (I am already tired of the journey) [Data 10.c3] and the English data “*I can never make my own decision*” [Data 6.c4]. While this egocentric motif dominates the experiential justifications for suicide, authors occasionally shift the thematic focus to survivors when addressing the future. For example, in “*Aa Cucu mah, insya Allah ka surga*” (Asep and Cucu, God willing,

[you] will go to heaven) [Data 11.c14], the children are fronted as the Topical Theme, prioritizing their long-term well-being over the author's current crisis.

This experiential progression is rhetorically managed and framed through Interpersonal Themes (15.3%, $n = 25$) and Textual Themes (9.8%, $n = 16$). Interpersonal Themes, primarily manifesting as vocatives, serve to emotionally prime the reader and ground the message directly within kinship networks. Authors strategically front-load these terms to establish relational obligation and achieve social harmony, as demonstrated by the brief Javanese vocative “*Mak*” (Mom) [Data 1.c1], the extensive familial tracking in “*Mamah, bapa, oma, bapa tétén, aa sadayana*” (Mom, Dad, Grandma, Uncle Teten, brothers, everyone) [Data 10.c1], and the intimate coordinate address “*Aa Asep, Cucu nya talina*” (Dear Aa Asep and Cucu) [Data 11.c1]. By placing these address terms at the absolute point of departure, the authors frame the tragic mandates that follow within the constraints of shared familial affection. Finally, Textual Themes link these components using structural conjunctions and logical binders, ensuring that the discourse moves smoothly and logically during the author's final words.

DISCUSSION

The Inner-World Description

The experiential profile of the corpus ($N = 11$ suicide notes, 130 total clauses, 121 processes) reveals a profound inner-world orientation. This is driven by the clear dominance of Relational processes (38.3%, $n = 46$) and Mental processes (20.0%, $n = 24$) over Material processes (25.0%, $n = 30$). This distribution proves that the primary semiotic function of this genre is internal self-definition and emotional justification rather than the recording of external actions. Through Relational Attributive systems, authors fix temporary hardships into permanent identities, as seen in the Sundanese clause “*Abi tos cape lalampahan*” (I am already tired of the journey) [Data 10.c3].

This inward focus contrasts sharply with the active, external perspective found in media and political discourses (Ghani et al., 2022; Mushtaq et al., 2021). It also diverges from social media mental health campaigns, which rely on Material processes (39%) to externalize diagnosis and recovery through visible steps (Anake et al., 2025). Furthermore, while active language builds empowerment for female entrepreneurs (43.4% Material; Khalil, 2024), the female authors who dominate this corpus (81.8%) deliberately reject this active positioning to build a static landscape of suffering. Unlike military discourse, where identity is subsumed by collective action (Kobylska, 2026), the grammar of finality prioritizes the state of existence itself to justify the final act.

The Addressee Effect and Functional Dichotomy

The transitivity framework demonstrates that the intended recipient plays a decisive role in shaping the note's experiential focus, creating a functional split determined by Tenor (relational distance). When addressing family members, authors utilize Relational and Mental processes to manage guilt and request absolution. In the Sundanese text, the author creates a clear moral hierarchy, deploying a Relational Possessive process to declare her children blameless, “*Aa Cucu mah can gaduh dosa*” (You both [Asep and Cucu] have no sins) [Data 11.c8]—before using a Material process to absorb all spiritual liability: “*keun wé mamah nu nanggung dosa-na*” (let Mama bear all the sins herself) [Data 11.c9]. These configurations tap into local cultural scripts like *Rukun* (social harmony), making a refusal of forgiveness culturally impossible.

When social distance increases, the language shifts to practical mandates driven by Material processes. Data 9 exemplifies this administrative handover, relying on logistical directives like “*tolong bayar utang aku*” (please pay my debt) [Data 9.c3] and “*cukup makamkan aku selayaknya*” (just bury me properly) [Data 9.c9]. This strips away the emotional weight, treating the recipient strictly as an executor for task completion. This functional split contrasts with the tactical Material dominance (59.4%) found in ideological or jihadist testaments (Gunawan et al., 2023). Consequently, tracking the presence or absence of this inner-world orientation offers a dependable baseline in forensic linguistics for evaluating textual authenticity and motivational intent.

The Negotiated Exchange of Finality

The interpersonal metafunction (evaluated across 130 clauses) highlights a structural tension between the Indicative Declarative mood (74.6%, $n = 97$), used to state suffering, and the Imperative mood (19.2%, $n = 25$), used to issue final demands. In the Indonesian context, this exchange is heavily shaped by regional linguistic options that carry specific illocutionary force.

The integration of Javanese and Sundanese lexicons, such as “*Sepurane aku mak*” (Forgive me, Mom) [Data 1.c4] and “*hampura abdi nyababkeun kitu*” (forgive me for causing this) [Data 10.c2], functions as a powerful tool for negotiating absolution. By leveraging these targeted regional selections, authors draw on the cultural obligations of filial piety and ancestral respect. This strategic choice shifts the interactive burden away from the

author and places it entirely onto the survivors (Sueb & Wafa, 2025). This grammatical configuration effectively forces the addressees

Thematic Centrality and Reader Entrapment

The textual organization of the notes (tracking 163 total Themes across 130 clauses) highlights absolute author centrality through the extensive use of unmarked Topical Themes (74.8%, $n = 122$). By consistently placing first-person singular pronouns, such as “I”, “Aku”, or the Sundanese “*Abi*”, in the clause-initial position, the writers construct a highly inward-focused monologue. This pattern traps the reader, forcing them to view the unfolding tragedy exclusively through the author’s subjective experience of pain ([Data 10.c3]; [Data 6.c4]).

Logogenetic shifts (meaning progression) occur only when the author front-loads the survivors into the thematic slot to prioritize their post-mortem future. For instance, in the Sundanese text, “*Aa Cucu mah... ka surga*” (Asep and Cucu... [you] will go to heaven) [Data 11.c14], the children are fronted as the Topical Theme to temporarily soften the impact of the final tragic mandate through kinship framing (Sueb & Wafa, 2025). Interpersonal Themes (15.3%, $n = 25$), primarily vocatives like “*Mak*” (Mom) [Data 1.c1], further ground these text segments within shared relational obligations.

Grammatical Metaphor as a Tool for Finality

A key finding within the corpus is the strategic deployment of ideational grammatical metaphor to stabilize and fix the author’s final reality. Through nominalization, fluid, ongoing experiences of suffering or quality are reconstrued as stable nouns, transforming internal crises into objective, unarguable facts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

This process stands out in the Indonesian data, “*ada banyak rasa sakit yang tidak bisa diceritakan*” (there is much pain that cannot be told) [Data 3.c7], where the quality of feeling painful is nominalized into the concrete noun *rasa sakit* (pain) within an existential clause, treating the trauma as an independent, inescapable reality. Similarly, nominalizations convert behavioral processes into single nominal groups that serve as Carriers for final evaluative judgments, as seen in the Sundanese clauses “*boga sagala gé bohong wé*” (having everything is just a lie) [Data 11.c10] and “*hirup numpuk hutang gé salah*” (living piling up debt is also wrong) [Data 11.c15].

Furthermore, nominalization allows authors to describe their impending death as an already completed event, increasing finality while removing the active Actor. In the Sundanese text, “*Bohkat teu ngadadak*” (This departure was not sudden) [Data 11.c3], the noun *Bohkat* (departure) frames the suicide as an established entity, closing off room for intervention. Similarly, in “*aya sadaran*” (there is awareness) [Data 10.c19], a mental process is converted into an existential noun, framing the realization as a permanent state rather than a fleeting thought. Through these metaphors, authors move from the dynamic grammar of spoken interaction to the static grammar of written testaments. As Alruwaili et al. (2025) note, this nominalizing strategy locks in the author’s perspective, presenting the choice to die as an unalterable, fixed fact that effectively negotiates the author’s exit from the social fabric.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian suicide notes ($N = 11$, 130 clauses) operate as complex semiotic instruments rather than mere emotional outbursts. By analyzing the corpus through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research presents its main results. Ideationally, Relational (38.3%) and Mental (20.0%) processes heavily dominate over Material actions (25.0%), proving the genre’s primary function is internal self-definition and the stabilization of suffering rather than the recording of external events. Interpersonally, the mix of Declarative statements (74.6%) and Imperative commands (19.2%), which functions to systematically shift moral or logistical burdens onto the survivors. The notes mix statements (74.6%) and commands (19.2%). This combination allows writers to explain their suffering while passing emotional or practical duties onto the survivors. Textually, first-person pronouns tightly control the discourse as unmarked Topical Themes (74.8%). By keeping themselves at the center, they force the reader to see the tragedy entirely through their eyes.

Beyond mapping these linguistic patterns, these results provide useful tools and insights for three different areas of study. First, for SFL & Sociolinguistics, suicide notes written in English not always capture local realities. In Indonesia, regional words like Sepurane (Javanese) or Hampura (Sundanese) do more than just say “sorry.” They carry cultural weight that draws on *Rukun* (social harmony), making it very hard for family members to refuse forgiveness. Future language studies must account for these cultural factors. For Psychology and Counseling, the language patterns are a clear warning sign of deep mental distress. When vulnerable individuals switch from using active, doing words to permanent being words (like “*Abi tos cape*” / I am already tired), it shows a trapped mindset. Therapists can use these language markers to spot negative thought patterns and help patients focus on active steps rather than static suffering. Finally, for Forensic Linguistics, the study reveals a

predictable pattern. Genuine notes to family focus deeply on internal feelings to get forgiveness, while notes to acquaintances focus on cold, practical tasks (like paying debts or arranging a burial). If a note addressed to a parent looks like a cold business checklist, it is an immediate red flag that the text might be staged, fake, or written under pressure.

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