

Rhetorical Moves in an Occluded Genre: A Qualitative Analysis of Suicide Notes

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master

in

Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies

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Ottawa, Ontario

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## Glossary

**Suicide notes:** texts written by individuals before attempting or committing suicide.

**English for Specific Purposes:** a field that “focuses on studying and teaching specialized varieties of English, most often to non-native speakers of English, in advanced academic and professional settings” (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 41).

**Communicative purpose:** communicative goal that can be achieved through language (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990, 2004).

**Move:** the functional unit in a text that reflects the communicative purpose of a specific part of a text (Henry & Roseberry, 2001).

**Step:** the building block of a move (Swales, 1990).

**Rhetorical structure:** the combination of the moves and the steps in a group of texts (Swales, 1990).

**Obligatory move:** a move that occurs in all of the texts (Joseph, Lim, & Nor, 2014).

**Quasi-obligatory move:** a move that occurs in most of the texts (Joseph et al., 2014).

**Optional move:** a move that occurs in less than 50% of the texts (Joseph et al., 2014).

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate suicide notes from the perspective of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Swales, 1990) genre approach. Specifically, the study examines the communicative purpose(s) and the rhetorical move/step structure (Swales, 1990) in a corpus of suicide notes. Eighty-six suicide notes (Leenaars, 1988; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957) were analyzed using the rhetorical move/step analysis (Swales, 1990). The findings suggest that suicide notes share common communicative purposes and rhetorical move/step structure, and, therefore, constitute a genre from the ESP perspective. By establishing the rhetorical move structure of suicide notes, this study addresses the lack of genre-based studies of suicide notes in the literature and makes a theoretically-based contribution to the fields of genre studies and, potentially, forensic linguistics.

*Keywords:* Suicide notes, ESP, genre, rhetorical move/step analysis

## Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of many individuals to whom I would like to express my thanks.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Natasha Artemeva, who provided me with constant support, constructive feedback and excellent suggestions through the whole project. It was her thought-provoking questions that helped me crystallize many research concepts and ideas.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support I received from the government of my beloved country, Saudi Arabia. The scholarship program has provided me and many other Saudi students with the opportunity to pursue higher education and gain valuable academic and personal experiences.

My undying gratitude goes to my family. My mother and my siblings who managed to motivate me and keep me focused although we are thousands of miles away. I specifically thank my mother for her unconditional love, support, and selfless sacrifices. She has and always will be my role model. I would like to express my appreciation to my husband, Abdulelah, who stood by my side through all the years I have spent studying, helping in every way he could while being a student himself. My two children, Fawz and Tamim, who were my sources of joy when I felt frustrated, will hopefully grow up to appreciate the value and rewards of education. It is those people, to whom this thesis is dedicated.

Thanks to my friends with whom I spent many phone calls and dinners boring them with my research details and they were happy to listen, encourage, and advise.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a background for the present study followed by the purpose of the study and the research questions this study seeks to answer. At the end of this chapter, an overview of the thesis is presented.

#### **Background for the Study**

A large and constantly growing body of literature has investigated suicide notes (e.g., Bauer et al., 1997; Black, 1993; Coster & Lester, 2013; Ioannou & Debowska, 2014; Joiner et al., 2002; Leenaars, 1988; O'Connor & Leenaars 2004; Shapero, 2011; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957, 1960). Suicide notes are texts usually written minutes before the suicide act (Leenaars, 1988; O'Connor & Leenaars, 2004), and they are considered as a source of data which researchers use to gain insights into the phenomenon of suicide. For that reason, many researchers have analyzed suicide notes (e.g., Coster & Lester, 2013; Leenaars, 1988; Shapero, 2011) in an attempt to better understand the final thoughts of the suicidal individual (Leenaars, 1999). The majority of suicide note studies examined the notes from a psychological perspective (e.g., Black, 1993; Leenaars, 1988; Linn & Lester, 1996; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957), with the focus of such examinations on testing theories developed in the field of psychology or on the application of predetermined psychological categories to the language used in suicide notes. Fewer studies analyzed the language of suicide notes from the discorsal or linguistic perspectives (e.g., Giles, 2007; Shapero, 2011); for example, Roubidoux (2012) analyzed suicide notes to examine how power is manifested in the pronouns used in suicide notes.

A handful of more recent studies that examined the linguistic expressions in suicide notes (e.g., Prokofyeva, 2013; Shapero, 2011) suggested that suicide notes might be viewed as a genre.

The notion of genre in these studies is used casually without a clear definition or a theoretical perspective described. Only recently have Applied Linguistics researchers (e.g., Artemeva, John Gulli, & Bennell, 2014; Samraj & Gawron, 2015) approached the study of suicide notes from theoretically informed genre perspectives. In these studies, genre is considered from a rhetorical perspective (Miller, 1994a, Swales, 1990), in which genres are seen as “recurrent” (Miller, 1994a, p. 20), “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language” (Hyland, 2002, p. 114). Moreover, Shapero (2011) referred to Swales (1996) by suggesting that suicide notes may constitute an “occluded,” or “hidden” genre, examples of which are not available for individuals who write in it. Even though more studies of suicide notes have recently linked suicide notes to the concept of genre (e.g., Artemeva et al., 2014; Prokofyeva, 2013; Shapero, 2011), it does not appear that, with the exception of Samraj and Gawron’s most recent research (2015), there has been a single investigation of suicide notes as a genre.

One of the well-known approaches to genre studies was developed within the field of *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP). The ESP field is situated within the larger field of *Language for Specific Purposes* (LSP). The term *genre* in the ESP field refers to “communicative events” (Swales, 1990, p. 45) that serve a *communicative purpose*, that is, a communicative goal that can be achieved through language (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990, 2004). This communicative goal is recognized by the *discourse community* that consists of members who use the genre and establish the conventions of how generic texts are written or spoken (Paltridge, 2013).

One of the most influential frameworks for genre analysis is the *rhetorical move/step analysis* developed by Swales (1990), wherein Swales defines rhetoric as “the use of language to accomplish something” (p. 6). Texts belonging to one specific genre (e.g., research article

introduction) are characterized by “a sequence of ‘moves” (Upton & Cohen, 2009, p. 588) with each move serving a specific communicative function. The combination of the moves and steps is referred to as rhetorical structure (Kanoksilapatham, 2005, 2015; Swales, 1990). The structure represents all the possible moves and steps that can occur in a specific genre.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

To address the gap in research indicated above, this study aims to investigate if suicide notes constitute a genre by applying the ESP genre analysis. It examines the communicative purpose(s) and the rhetorical structure (if any) of suicide notes, that is, the moves and the steps that may be present. As well, Bhatia’s (1993, 2004) framework for analyzing unfamiliar genres is considered. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the moves and the steps that are present in suicide notes and how consistent the moves/steps are across the selected corpus of suicide notes?
2. Is there a shared communicative purpose in suicide notes and, consequently, do suicide notes constitute a genre as defined by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) within the ESP framework?
3. If suicide notes do constitute a genre, what kind of genre is it?

The investigation directed towards establishing a rhetorical move structure of suicide notes addresses the lack of genre-based studies of suicide notes in the literature. The study offers a theoretically-based contribution to the fields of genre studies and, potentially, forensic linguistics (Cotterill, 2010; Olsson, 2004).

### **Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters: chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework adopted in this study including the key concepts of the communicative purpose, discourse

community, and genre as defined from the ESP genre perspective. In chapter 2, I also present the rhetorical move/step analysis (Swales, 1990) and the concept of “occluded” genres (Swales, 1996). In chapter 3, I present an overview of different approaches used in the analysis of suicide notes followed by the discussion of the importance of this study in the light of the discussed literature. Chapter 4 includes a summary of the pilot study I conducted prior to writing this thesis. Then, a description of the methods used in the analysis is provided. The findings of the move/step analysis are presented in two chapters. Chapter 5 presents, defines, and discusses the types of the moves and steps that are identified in suicide notes. In addition, a discussion that relates the current findings of this study to previous research on suicide notes is presented. Chapter 6 is devoted to interpreting the findings in the light of the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 7 is a summary of the findings of the present research study. It also highlights the implications and addresses the limitations of the present study. The chapter concludes with some directions for future research.

## Chapter Two

### Theoretical Framework

This chapter situates the research study within the theoretical framework of the ESP genre tradition. It begins with an introduction to the ESP genre approach followed by the definitions of the communicative purpose, discourse community, and genre. It also discusses the rhetorical move/step analysis and the concept of “occluded” genres since they are central to this research study.

In the past 30 years, the concept of genre has become prevalent in several disciplines such as applied linguistics, composition studies, and education (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). The growing interest in the concept of genre and its analytical and educational implications has been reflected in the development of various scholarly approaches. These approaches to genre studies include, but are not limited to, Rhetorical Genre Studies (also known as North American genre theory and New Rhetoric genre theory), the Sydney School based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, and ESP (for a full discussion of different schools of genre theories, see Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hyon, 1996). The ESP genre approach is the focus of this thesis.

ESP is a broad pedagogical and analytical field that focuses on teaching English to non-native speakers of English in academic and professional settings (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Cheng, 2007). Researchers who conduct studies in the ESP field use different analytical tools to analyze oral and written genres (Hyon, 1996). The rhetorical move/step analysis is both an analytical and pedagogical tool used to analyze corpora of texts and is also employed to teach non-native speakers of English to write in a specific genre using its rhetorical structure, that is, the rhetorical moves found in a corpus of generic texts.

In the next section, I further clarify the central concepts in the ESP genre analysis introduced in Chapter 1. These include the communicative purpose, discourse community, and genre.

### **The Concept of Communicative Purpose in the ESP Genre Approach**

In the Swalesian genre approach, one of the key concepts essential for identifying and categorizing genres is the communicative purpose(s) a genre serves. Swales (1990) views the communicative purpose as “both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action” (p. 58). Rhetorical action refers to the use of language to achieve a specific purpose. Genres in the ESP tradition are identified primarily according to their communicative purpose(s), that is, the communicative goals that can be achieved through genres (Swales, 1990, 2004). Bhatia (1993) emphasizes the importance of the communicative purpose in defining a genre and notes that any key modifications in the communicative purpose would result in the development of a different genre.

To illustrate how the communicative purpose is used to identify a genre, in the study of personal statements, which prospective students are required to write before gaining admission to a medical/dental school, Ding (2007) demonstrates that the communicative purpose of such statements is to promote the student qualifications and abilities and show the student’s competency in the chosen field of studies. This shared communicative purpose of all personal statements is what defines them as a genre. Similarly, academic business case reports, that is, reports submitted by students as assignments in business schools, share a communicative purpose of demonstrating the students’ ability to apply the knowledge acquired throughout the

course to a case. Consequently, a group of such texts constitutes a genre based on the shared communicative purpose (Nathan, 2013).

### **The Concept of Discourse Community in the ESP Genre Approach**

Another central concept in the ESP genre approach is the discourse community. Swales (1990) offers six characteristics to identify a discourse community, that is, a group of people, which

1. “ has a broadly agreed set of common public goals
2. has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members
3. uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback
4. utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aim
5. has acquired some specific lexis
6. has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise. . . . survival of the community depends on a reasonable ratio between novices and experts.” (pp. 24-27)

Although Swales’s criteria for identifying a discourse community are neatly introduced, it is often a challenging task to identify such communities. Revisiting these criteria, Swales himself calls the concept of discourse community a “powerful but troubled concept” (1998, p. 2). Additionally, many scholars (e.g., Borg, 2003; Harris, 1989) argued that the concept of discourse community is not a well-defined concept and that such issues related to the definition of discourse community as the size and the stability of a discourse community and its genres need to be addressed (Borg, 2003).

## The Concept of Genre in the ESP Approach

Swales (1990), whose work was seminal in shaping genre theory in the ESP tradition, views the term genre as “extremely slippery” (p. 33). However, he attempts to give a compact definition of genre by listing some of its characteristics:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. (p. 58)

Swales (1990) sees genre as consisting of “communicative events” (p. 45). These events are not random, but serve particular communicative purpose(s) which is realized by the members of the discourse community. In addition to identifying the communicative purpose(s) of a group of texts, Swales (1990) introduced two approaches that are developed to aid in the identification of genre membership of texts (i.e., identifying texts belonging to a single genre). The first is the *definitional* approach, which includes a list of properties of texts that can be used to identify members belonging to a specific category. For example, identifying texts that belong to the research article genre depends on some defining characteristics of these texts, such as introduction, method, results, and conclusion sections. The other approach, which is based on a philosophical approach originally proposed by Wittgenstein (1958) and later applied to genre theory, is the *family resemblance* approach. Identifying texts belonging to a genre in this approach is based on similarities between the texts rather than a list of defining characteristics. Wittgenstein (1958) pointed out that when identifying items in this approach, “we see a

complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.” (p. 31).

Swales (1990) provides an example of lectures as a genre identified according to the *family resemblance* approach. Although the content of lectures might vary depending on the communicative purpose and the discourse community involved, overall similarities among lectures exist, which allow for establishing the membership of lectures in one genre, with some lectures corresponding to the core characteristics of the genre such as the seating or speaking roles arrangements and others belonging to the genre based on similarities.

In the light of these two approaches, Swales (1990) announces that “exemplars or instances of genres vary in their prototypicality” (p. 49), where *prototypicality* refers to the typical defining characteristics which are used to categorize texts. Texts that share overall resemblances of form, structure, and audience could be perceived as *exemplars* of a genre, as long as the linguistic and structural patterns in the texts correspond to the shared communicative purpose of the genre (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). Swales argues that genre membership of texts is not only established by identifying their salient properties with a characteristics list that can include or exclude examples of genre, but that some exemplars of a genre can be also defined along a continuum of similarities.

Paltridge (1995) provides an example of research articles that are presented as “letters to the editor” (p. 395) in a journal called *Nature*. Although these letters do not follow the format of a “typical” research article with introduction, methods, results, and conclusion sections (Swales, 1990, 2004), they are still considered examples, or instances, of research articles since these letters share the same communicative purpose as that of research articles.

## Recent Developments in the ESP Genre Approach

Lately, researchers in the ESP field have reconsidered the central role of the communicative purpose as a privileged criterion in identifying genres. Askehave (1999) and Askehave and Swales (2001) note that, occasionally, researchers (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990) have assigned a single communicative purpose to one specific genre, thus, underestimating the complexity of the communicative purpose(s). Askehave and Swales reflect on this problem and state that “‘the communicative purpose’ has assumed a taken-for-granted status, a convenient but under-considered starting point for the analyst” (p. 197). They propose that genre analysts begin with identifying a *provisional* purpose of the genre in question before they *repurpose* the genre. To illustrate, Askehave and Swales demonstrate how genres could be serving multiple purposes by presenting an investigation of the communicative purpose(s) of shopping lists, response letters to recommendations, and company brochures. Shopping lists, for example, serve as a reminder of what to buy, but they also stop the shoppers from buying things that they do not need. Askehave and Swales further observe that “sets of communicative purposes” (p. 210) can be identified as a result of a thorough investigation of a genre in order to determine the various communicative purposes the genre achieves.

This investigation of multiple communicative purposes of one genre is exemplified in the work of Hyon (2008) in which she examined the communicative purpose(s) of retention-promotion-tenure (RPT) reports. Specifically, she observed that the use of playfulness and inventiveness in RPT reports does not alter the *official* communicative purpose of the genre which is to evaluate faculty. However, the elements of playfulness and inventiveness serve “unofficial” goals (p. 178) such as entertaining the reader.

It is important to remember that the ESP genre approach has been mainly used to investigate the linguistic features of academic and professional genres, which have usually considered such discourse communities as students, teachers, and employers. These communities possess all or some of the characteristics of discourse communities suggested by Swales (1990). Some non-academic genres have been explored using this approach as well, as it has proved useful in investigating the communicative purpose(s) and the rhetorical structure of a group of texts, regardless of whether the texts are written in academic, professional, or non-academic settings. Some examples of non-academic genre analyses are genre analyses of obituaries in newsletters (e.g., Ondimu, 2014), birthmother letters (letters to expectant mothers which are written by parents who want to adopt a child asking to be considered for adopting the unborn child) (e.g., Upton & Cohen, 2009), and scam/fraud emails (e.g., Freiermuth, 2011). This research study also applies the ESP genre analysis to non-academic texts, namely, suicide notes.

### **Rhetorical Move/Step Analysis**

Swales (1990) argues that texts are divided into units or “moves” depending on the communicative purpose each unit serves. A *move* is defined as “a discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse” (Swales, 2004, p. 228). Swales also adds that a move in the ESP genre analysis is identified by recognizing the functional role of the move in a text. The identification of a move does not only involve the boundaries of a sentence or a paragraph. Each move may consist of several sentences or paragraphs, which, considered together, serve a specific communicative purpose. The sub-purposes of the moves ultimately shape the overall communicative purpose and the rhetorical structure of the genre (e.g., Akar & Louhiala-Salminen, 1999; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Bhatia, 1993; Kanoksilapatham, 2015; Parodi, 2014; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013). The distinctive

organization of the moves in texts belonging to one genre is “what provides its identity and distinguishes it from other genres” (Parodi, 2014, p. 67).

For example, Swales (1990) examined research article introductions by applying the rhetorical move-analysis framework. The analysis resulted in what is now known as the Create a Research Space (CARS) model, the model that describes the moves that can occur in research article introductions, that is, their rhetorical genre structure. The model also identifies the steps within moves (i.e., options the writers use in a genre to achieve the communicative purpose of a move) found in research article introductions.

After moves and steps in a genre have been identified based on their function (i.e., communicative purpose), the analysis is usually complemented by an investigation of some linguistic realizations of the genre purpose(s). These include the linguistic features that characterize moves such as the use of tenses, verbs, voice, or pronouns. The purpose of such integration of move/step analysis and lexico-grammatical analysis is to capture how moves are linguistically constructed in texts belonging to the same genre (Joseph et al., 2014).

For example, in the CARS model (Swales, 1990), typical moves in the research article introductions were first identified based on the communicative purpose of each move. These moves include: “establishing a territory” (move 1), “establishing a niche” (move 2), and “occupying the niche” (move 3). Within the identified moves, Swales distinguishes the steps that build the moves such as, for example, the “indicating a gap” step or the “adding to what is known” step in move 2. Further analysis of lexico-grammatical features was conducted by investigating different features, such as the frequency of reporting verbs (e.g., *show*, *claim*). Swales also examined how authors of research article introductions use different citation formats and the reasons why they choose a specific format over the other.

Following the publication of the CARS model, some researchers observed that Swales's (1990) model did not capture the rhetorical structure of all the research article introductions in various disciplines (e.g., Anthony's, 1999 study of research article introductions in software engineering articles; Samraj's, 2002 comparative study of research article introductions in *Wildlife Behavior and Conservation Biology*). For that reason, Swales (2004) revised the proposed CARS model and made adjustments to some of the identified moves and steps to reflect the variation in introductions produced in different disciplines. Several ESP genre-based studies used a combination of the suggested CARS models devised by Swales in 1990 and 2004 (e.g., Del Saz Rubio, 2011; Joseph et al., 2014) to further describe the rhetorical structure of the genre of research article introductions in different disciplines.

A diversity of academic genres and disciplines has been examined by effectively extending the rhetorical move-analysis framework of research article introductions (Swales, 1990, 2004) and applying it to other sections of the research article such as research article abstracts (e.g., Lorés, 2004; Pho, 2008; Santos, 1996; Suntara & Usaha, 2013), results section in research articles (e.g., Bruce, 2009; Williams, 1999), and the complete research article (e.g., Kanoksilapatham, 2005, 2015; Lin & Evans, 2012; Tessuto, 2015). As well, other academic genres have been examined such as the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) conference proposals (e.g., Halleck & Connor, 2006), grant proposals (e.g., Connor, 2000; Connor & Mauranen, 1999), and lecture introductions (e.g., Thompson, 1994). Scholars have also explored business genres using Swales's rhetorical analysis, such as application letters (e.g., Henry & Roseberry, 2001), sales promotion letters (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Yunxia, 2000), job applications (e.g., Bhatia, 1993), and tax computation letters (e.g., Flowerdew & Wan, 2006).

Move analysis is one example of a *top-down* approach (Biber, Connor, & Upton, 2007; Pho, 2008) of genre analysis. A top-down approach is an analytical approach in which moves are assigned first on the basis of content, meaning, and function of the parts in a text. Then, linguistic realizations are examined in the identified moves, as explained above. This analytical approach is different from a *bottom-up* analysis (Biber et al., 2007; Pho, 2008) which refers to identifying segments of texts based on specific linguistic clues such as using *to sum up* to indicate the goal of providing a conclusion in, for example, a research article. The linguistically identified segments are grouped together, and then the communicative purpose of the linguistically similar segments is determined. What differentiates these two analytical approaches is the role of the communicative purpose or the function each segment serves in a text. In a top-down approach, the communicative purpose is the first step while in a bottom-up approach, the function of the linguistic segments is determined as a final step in the analysis (Biber et al., 2007).

### **Analyzing Unfamiliar Genres**

Bhatia (1993) further developed the genre analysis approach initially proposed by Swales (1990) and extended its application to language use in professional settings. While Swales uses the term “steps” to refer to the building blocks of a move, Bhatia labels them as “different rhetorical strategies” (p. 30).

Bhatia (1993) outlined a seven-stage practical process used to conduct ESP genre analysis, which this research study adopts to complement the Swalesian genre analysis approach discussed above. The stages involve:

1. “Placing the given genre-text in a situational context” (p. 22), where the situational context includes past experience and discipline knowledge which the researcher acquires from

being part of the community the genre belongs to. If the researcher is not a part of that community, it is suggested that knowledge and experience can be obtained from surveying the literature related to the genre.

2. “Surveying existing literature” (p. 22), which includes many resources such as theories of genre analysis, methods, history of the community that uses the genre, and looking at related genres.
3. “Refining situational/contextual analysis” (p. 23) by identifying the speaker/writer of the text in question, audience, the community, other related texts, and examining the relationships of all these combined.
4. “Selecting corpus” (p. 23) by establishing the communicative purpose(s) and the context.
5. “Studying the institutional context” (p. 24) by examining the conventions and rules of language use. These rules can be explicitly or implicitly stated and can be found in manuals, guide books, and literature available, depending on the context of the investigated genre.
6. “Levels of linguistic analysis” (p. 24) by conducting one or more of the levels of linguistic analysis. These levels include the analyses of lexico-grammatical features such as tenses and clauses, text-patterning or textualization, which explains the purpose of a particular linguistic feature in a text, and structural organization of the text-genre, which includes assigning moves according to the specific communicative function they serve in a text. The communicative purpose of each move is “always subservient to the overall communicative purpose of the genre” (p. 30). An example of structural interpretation of a text-genre is the CARS model (Swales, 1990).

7. “Specialist information in genre analysis” (p. 34), which can be obtained by consulting another analyst and/or a user of the genre (an informant) to check the findings. This will add validity to the findings, as well as add an informant’s perceptions to the analysis.

Bhatia pointed out that the stages suggested in this analysis do not have to be followed in the order introduced above. Thus, these stages provide general guidelines that can be adapted by the genre analyst depending on the genre in question.

In *Worlds of Written Discourse: A genre-based view*, Bhatia (2004) added ethnographic analysis as an additional step in genre analysis. Such an analysis entails studying the context where a particular text is “situated” (p. 166) by examining the physical environment, experts’ behavior, experience of the members, and modes that contribute to genre construction. The ethnographic analysis also depends on the nature of the genre in question and on the accessibility of the context in which the genre in question is constructed.

In 1980s-1990s, ESP research tended to focus on public or “open” (Swales & Feak, 2000, p. 8) genres, which are easily accessible, such as the research article. For example, Swales (1990) assigned a prominent role to the research article because it is located at the focal point of research-process genres. In other words, there is “a dynamic relationship” (Swales, 1990, p. 177) between the main genre of research article and other genres such as abstracts, grant proposals and dissertations. In 1996, Swales introduced less public genres that operate to support the research-process. He called such genres “occluded” genres. They are discussed in the next section.

### **Occluded Genres**

Originally, Swales (1996) described “occluded” genres as genres that are “typically hidden, ‘out of sight’ or ‘occluded’ from the public gaze” (p. 46) and function to support the

research process. An example of such a genre is the submission letter, a document authors submit with the manuscript to the editor. Swales argues that such genres are not public, written for particular individuals, and writers do not often have access to examples of the genre. He also provides a partial list of academic “occluded” genres:

- “Request letters (for data, copies of papers, advice, etc.)
- Application letters (for jobs, scholarships, etc.)
- Submission letters (accompanying articles, etc.)
- Research proposals (for outside funding, etc.)
- Recommendation letters (for students, job seekers, etc.)
- Article reviews (as part of the review process)
- Book or grant proposal reviews (as above)
- Evaluation letters for tenure or promotion (for academic committees)
- External evaluations (for academic institutions)” (p. 47)

Many researchers have investigated some of the “occluded” genres included in the above list. Some studies described the rhetorical structure of letters of job applications (e.g., Connor, Davis, & de Rycker, 1995; Upton & Connor, 2001), evaluation letters for tenure or promotion (e.g., Hyon, 2008), editorial letters (e.g., Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002), and MBA thought essays (e.g., Loudermilk, 2007).

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has reviewed the central aspects of the ESP genre approach, including the concepts of communicative purpose, discourse community, and genre. It also demonstrated how a genre is identified according to two approaches proposed by Swales (1990) and how a genre might serve a set of communicative purposes. The chapter also illustrated the genre analysis

approach known as the rhetorical move/step analysis and explained the concept of “occluded” genres.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter presents an overview of the previous research on suicide notes including different approaches used and discusses the importance of this study in the light of the previous research.

The importance of suicide notes lies in that they are the texts written by individuals who committed (completers) or attempted to commit suicide (attempters) (Black, 1993); hence, they are considered as a valuable source of information that might contribute to understanding the completer's (or attempter's) mind and his/her final thoughts (Darbonne, 1969; Jacobs, 1971; Leenaars, 1999; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957) and sometimes provide information on the motives behind the act (Canetto & Lester, 2002; Chia, Chia, & Tai, 2008; Olson, 2005). Suicide notes are also crucial pieces of evidence used in the investigation of death and in courts (Bennell, Jones, & Taylor, 2011; Koehler, 2007; Leenaars, 1999) to confirm the cause of death, whether it being a true suicide or a homicide accompanied by a fake note (i.e., not a real suicide note produced by the decedent but rather a note produced by another individual). Additionally, analyzing and understanding suicide notes can be important in decreasing suicide attempts through developing appropriate prevention programs (Nashef, 2010; O'Connor, Sheehy, & O'Connor, 1999; Olson, 2005).

Given the importance of suicide notes, several researchers have investigated the linguistic expressions using different approaches and various analysis tools including manual and computerized methods. The methods of analysis of suicide notes utilized content analysis and theoretical classification analysis (e.g., Darbonne, 1969; Leenaars, 1988; Lester & Heim, 1992; Osgood & Walker, 1959) to examine the most recurrent topics (i.e., themes) and use the

information in order to explore the relationship between the content in the notes and the act of suicide (Olson, 2005). The methods of analysis have evolved to include other approaches such as constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), that is, exploring and analyzing the data in order to construct theories emerging from the data itself (e.g., Coster & Lester, 2013; McClelland, Reicher, & Booth, 2000; Olson, 2005) and corpus linguistics approach (e.g., Shapero, 2011), which examines “the extent to which certain features of language use are associated with contextual factors ... to uncover characteristic patterns of language use and to generalize from the collected texts to other texts of a similar type” (Hall, Smith, & Wicaksono, 2011, p. 79). Some of these approaches are introduced in the next section.

### **Approaches to the Analysis of Suicide Notes**

**Genuine and simulated suicide notes.** Shneidman, recognized as the father of contemporary study of suicide, or suicidology, was able to shed light on how the suicidal mind worked by using the most valuable and critical data available, that is, suicide notes (Leenaars, 2010a, 2010b).

In their ground-breaking analysis of suicide notes, Shneidman and Farberow (1957) introduced the term “simulated” suicide notes, which refers to the notes written in a lab setting by non-suicidal individuals who are asked to envision that they are ending their own lives. The volunteers in the Shneidman and Farberow study of simulated suicide notes came from different groups, such as labor unions, and “the general community” (Shneidman & Farberow, 1957, p. 199). The volunteers were first given a personality questionnaire and then were interviewed before eliciting the notes to ensure that there were no indications of personality disorders that could lead the volunteers to think of suicide after the experiment.

The foundational study was based on the suicide notes collected by Shneidman from a coroner's office in Los Angeles County, and it involved comparing genuine, that is, real, suicide notes written by people who attempted or completed suicide, and simulated suicide notes to determine the differences and/or similarities between the two types of suicide notes. Shneidman and Farberow (1957) examined 33 genuine suicide notes out of 721 suicide notes Shneidman found in the coroner's office. The notes were written between 1945 and 1954. The selected corpus for the study included genuine suicide notes written by 25-59 years old white protestant males born in the USA.

The 33 genuine suicide notes writers were matched with 33 simulated suicide notes writers using the parameters of gender, age, and occupation. To analyze the set of genuine and simulated suicide notes (66 total), a psychological method called Discomfort Relief Quotient (DRQ) was used, which examined whether "a discrete idea regardless of number of words" (p. 7), or "thought unit", expressed discomfort, relief or neutral feelings. Thought units that reflected guilt, blame, and hatred were categorized as *discomfort* statements while other thought units which represented warm and loving expressions were considered as *relief* statements. *Neutral* statements were those free of tension or relief. The analysis showed that genuine suicide notes contained more thought units that expressed intense discomfort than the simulated notes did. As well, genuine suicide notes had more neutral thought units which were represented by giving instructions to survivors or relatives of the note writer.

Shneidman and Farberow's (1957) innovative study marked the beginning of the subsequent investigations of suicide notes and many more recent studies (e.g., Bennell et al., 2011; Ioannou & Debowska, 2014; Roubidoux, 2012; Shapero, 2011) still use Shneidman and

Farberow's paired samples of genuine and simulated suicide notes, although the samples date back to 1957.

Some studies set out to investigate newly obtained corpora of genuine and simulated suicide notes (e.g., Black, 1993, corpus from San Francisco). Some shared findings of this line of research, similarly to the pioneering study by Shneidman and Farberow (1957), suggest that genuine suicide notes reflect more positive feelings such as the expressions of love and affection (e.g., Ioannou & Debowska, 2014) are longer, and contain more instructions to survivors compared to simulated suicide notes (e.g., Black, 1993; Osgood & Walker, 1959).

More recently, comparing genuine and simulated suicide notes as a source of research data has been critiqued (Black, 1993; Lester, 1988) since simulated suicide notes are not produced in a real situation as is the case with genuine suicide notes, wherein the individual is writing a suicide note with the intention of committing suicide after. The writers of the simulated suicide notes are aware of role-playing a suicidal person, which might affect the language and the structure of the note. Further, Black (1993) argues that the differences found between genuine and simulated suicide notes might be attributed to the history of depression of the suicidal person and not related to the suicidal/non-suicidal state of mind. All these issues can impact the structure of the note; thus, differences or similarities which are drawn from comparing the language of genuine and simulated suicide notes may not be fully justified due to the afore-mentioned issues.

In spite of the amount of research that has been undertaken to distinguish genuine and simulated suicide notes, there is still no reliable linguistic evidence that can be used to help identify the two types of suicide notes (Bennell et al., 2011; Shapero, 2011). The reason for that is, according to Shapero, that genuine and simulated suicide notes share some of the universal

linguistic characteristics which have been established in suicide notes research. Shapero further illustrates that the linguistic variables that distinguish genuine and simulated suicide notes cannot be generalized or used extensively to determine the authenticity of a suicide note because simulated suicide notes may contain some of the linguistic characteristics of genuine suicide notes, making it difficult to confirm their authenticity.

Drawing on a comparison between genuine suicide notes and suicide posts, that is, texts that are published on webpages concerned with the phenomenon of suicide and which contain “suicide letters, comments about suicide and replies to posts on the Web” (Prokofyeva, 2013, p. 1), Prokofyeva (2013) not only explored the linguistic expressions and emotions used within suicide notes, but also described the overall structure (i.e., the organization of the texts) of suicide notes. She described the structure of genuine suicide notes in a way similar to the move/step structure (Swales, 1990). However, Prokofyeva did not provide a clarification of the method used to analyze the structure of suicide notes, nor did she illustrate how she categorized the segments of the texts. The communicative purpose of the segments in suicide notes was not the main criterion to devise the text structure of suicide notes in her research study. She identified “components” (p. 28) rather than rhetorical moves. These *components* contained multiple communicative purposes which were grouped together in a single category. For example, she introduced a category called “culmination” (p. 28) which included different expressions in suicide notes that served different communicative purposes such as expressing love, asking for forgiveness, assigning blame, and giving instructions to others. Her study further demonstrates some of the characteristics of genuine suicide notes such as clear reasoning in which the writer explains the reasons for committing suicide, absence of expressions of hope,

and a consistent structure of all the genuine suicide notes in the corpus compared to the disorganized structure of suicide posts.

**Suicide notes written by individuals who completed suicide and those who attempted suicide.** To better understand suicide notes from a different perspective away from the concerns indicated above, streams of research investigating suicide notes written by completers and suicide notes written by attempters have emerged (e.g., Handelman & Lester, 2007; Joiner et al., 2002). Suicide notes written by completers and attempters have been produced in a real situation, with less manipulation or outside interference that might affect the structure and the language of suicide notes (Handelman & Lester, 2007; Lester, 1988), compared to the lab setting where an individual is asked to write a simulated note, as in the study of Shneidman and Farberow (1957).

In approaching suicide notes from this new perspective, several researchers put psychological theories to the test. Joiner et al. (2002) evaluated the expressions of being a burden on loved ones, that is, the aspect of “perceived burdensomeness toward kin” (p. 535) in suicide notes. This perception of burdensomeness was thought to characterize suicide notes written by completers. Confirming the theory proposed, the analysis showed that the expressions of burdensomeness significantly correlated with the completed suicides.

Likewise, Handelman and Lester (2007), using a text analysis program called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), examined 76 variables in suicide notes. The findings showed that suicide notes written by completers had fewer words that indicated belongingness like *with* or *include* compared to suicide notes written by attempters, signifying that individuals who completed suicide might have felt isolated and not integrated into society. Some other differences noted in suicide notes written by completers were the presence of more positive

emotional expressions (e.g., *happy, good*) and more verbs referring to future time (e.g., *will, might*). Conversely, Leenaars, Lester, and Yang (1992) reported no significant difference between suicide notes written by completers and those written by attempters.

Although these examinations involved the language used in suicide notes, they mostly focused on validating some of the existing theories of suicide and exploring some of the psychological aspects of suicide such as the relationship between the language used and the method of suicide (hanging, shooting, etc.) (e.g., Joiner et al., 2002). Other enquiries were developed to explore different variables that might affect the linguistic choices in suicide notes such as age and gender of the writers of suicide notes. These are introduced below.

**Relationship between demographics of suicidal individuals and language used in suicide notes.** Questions have been raised about whether suicide notes' content differs according to age or gender of the note writer. There have been a number of studies exploring only age effects as a variable in suicide notes (e.g., Darbonne, 1969; Farberow & Shneidman, 1957), or combining the effects of both age and gender on the linguistic expressions in suicide notes (e.g., Black & Lester, 2003; Linn & Lester, 1996).

Analyzing the content of suicide notes according to the writer's age formed the central focus of many studies. Using a general approach to the investigation, that is, examining suicide notes written by different age groups without focusing on a single age group, Darbonne (1969) has identified some of the linguistic expressions in suicide notes according to the age of the note writer and investigated how suicidal ideation, that is, the thoughts a suicidal individual has about killing oneself reflected in language used, is likely to differ depending on the writer's age. Drawing conclusions from a wide range, 20 to 60 years and over, of age groups, the study found that there was some age-specific content realized through the language used in suicide notes.

For example, individuals between 20 and 39 years old used statements of rejection in their notes, in contrast to older adults (60 years old and over) who used pain and illness expressions. Other research studies (Bauer et al., 1997; Black & Lester, 2003; Farberow & Shneidman, 1957) similarly reported that suicide notes written by older adults contained expressions of being unable to cope with illness, pain, tiredness, or isolation.

Lester and Reeve (1982) also observed that older individuals, compared to young individuals, used more feeling verbs than action verbs and were not as clear as their young counterparts in stating their suicidal intention, that is, expressing their intended act of suicide explicitly in the note. Leenaars (1988) confirmed Lester and Reeve's finding by examining suicide notes written by young adults. Leenaars pointed out that suicide notes written by young adults contained clear expressions of the desire to leave or escape, compared to other suicide notes written by other age groups.

Effects of gender on the language of suicide notes have also been examined by exploring differences and/or similarities in the expressions used in suicide notes. Some researchers found no significant difference in the content of suicide notes in terms of gender (e.g., Leenaars, 1988; Lester & Heim, 1992; Linn & Lester, 1996), while other investigations of the effects of gender and age on the language of suicide notes (e.g., Black & Lester, 2003; Delgado, 2013; Ho, Yip, Chiu, & Halliday, 1998) revealed some differences. For example, the linguistic expressions in suicide notes written by females included less hostile words and fewer instruction statements than those written by males (Black & Lester, 2003), more pain and failure-related expressions, language associated with afterlife such as *watching over loved ones after death* and asking for forgiveness (Delgado, 2013).

As well, Ho et al. (1998) reported some differences found in the language used by males and females in suicide notes. For example, young females left longer notes and asked for forgiveness by using expressions such as *forgive me* or *sorry*, while male teenagers mainly mentioned job and financial problems in their notes to indicate reasons for the act of suicide. Ho et al. also added that the content of suicide notes realized through language differed between females of different ages, observing that suicide notes written by older females, compared to suicide notes left by younger females, were shorter in length and used expressions of tiredness, illness and pain; thus, confirming the findings found in previous research on the effects of age on the language of suicide notes (e.g., Bauer et al., 1997; Black & Lester, 2003; Darbonne, 1969; Farberow & Shneidman, 1957).

**Suicide motivation expressions in suicide notes.** A popular psychological theory of suicide has been proposed by Menninger (1938) in which he stated that suicide is motivated by many factors summarized in three main statements: *the wish to kill*, *the wish to be killed*, and *the wish to die*. These linguistic expressions of suicide motivations are present in suicide notes in varying degrees (Farberow & Shneidman, 1957).

Following the view of suicide motivations introduced by Menninger, psychologists and suicidologists made use of this theory in researching the presence of linguistic expressions of motives in suicide notes. A small scale study by Leenaars et al. (1992) involved the analysis of suicide notes written by completers and attempters in relation to Menninger's theory of suicide. The analysis included 22 suicide notes in total and did not yield any significant differences between suicide notes written by completers and those written by attempters.

Other studies have considered the relationship between the expressions of suicide motives in suicide notes and the effect of the demographic variables such as age and gender (e.g.,

Canetto & Lester, 2002; Lester, Wood, Williams, & Haines, 2004). By investigating the effects of gender on the expressions of suicide motivations, Canetto and Lester (2002) have been able to show that expressions of love were more prevalent than expressions of achievement as motives used in suicide notes. They concluded that love statements were more often mentioned in suicide notes as motives for the act of suicide, regardless of the gender of the note writer. However, Lester et al. (2004) observed that suicide notes written by females, compared to suicide notes written by males, included more expressions of escape and less love and romance statements.

Related to the effects of age on the expressions of suicide motivations, Farberow and Shniedman (1957), drawing on Menninger's theory, demonstrated that older individuals are more likely to describe *the wish to die* compared to the two other expressions of motives for suicide (*the wish to kill, the wish to be killed*). However, Lester and Hummel (1980) reached a different conclusion, finding that the statements of *the wish to die* were less likely included in suicide notes written by elderly adults.

**Emotional themes in suicide notes.** Investigations of emotions in suicide notes have been carried out by many researchers. Some research studies tended to focus on one emotional expression in suicide notes such as blame expressions (e.g., McClelland et al., 2000; Nashef, 2010), expressions of being a burden on loved ones (e.g., Joiner et al., 2002), while other studies examined the emotional themes found in suicide notes in order to explore the most recurrent emotions that characterized the language of suicide notes (e.g., Coster & Lester, 2013; Ho et al., 1998; O'Conner et al., 1999; Pestian, Matykiewicz, & Linn-Gust, 2012). Research on the subject of emotional themes in suicide notes has been mostly restricted to exploring emotional expressions that relate to the psychological and emotional factors leading to the act of suicide such as depression, isolation and hopelessness. Studies were more concerned with the

expressions of emotions in order to use those for the prevention and detection of suicidal behavior. Also, researchers used many suicide theories as the basis of their investigation of emotional themes, that is, they already had in mind the kind of words and expressions that were to occur in suicide notes and confirmed that through the analysis of suicide notes. One exception is Pestian et al.'s (2012) study in which the authors attempted to build a big corpus (n= 1278) of annotated suicide notes, that is, notes that are marked for certain characteristics such as emotions. Although this study was in its introductory stages, it is considered a great effort in suicide notes research which can be utilized by many scholars interested in this area as a source for their analysis.

**Investigations of pronouns in suicide notes.** Pronouns have been examined in suicide notes to reveal, for example, if the note writer is genuine in his intent to commit suicide, based on which kind of pronouns are used in the note. One study by Tuckman and Ziegler (1966) investigated pronouns in suicide notes (using Shneidman and Farberow, 1957 corpus of genuine and simulated suicide notes) to explore the difference between using *I* versus other referential pronouns. The two authors hypothesized that using more self-reference pronouns is a reflection of a genuine intent to commit suicide and social immaturity of the suicidal individual. The findings yielded no difference in the use of referential pronouns in genuine and simulated suicide notes. In contrast to this finding, Roubidoux (2012) was able to establish a connection between the use of first-person active pronouns and the individual's genuine intent to commit suicide through her analysis of the use of pronouns in suicide notes. She studied how pronouns were used in suicide notes regarding their frequency of occurrence, and how the pronouns were used in context. Roubidoux associated the use of first-person active pronouns in suicide notes to

power, confirming that using first-person active pronouns reflected how individuals act on their decisions powerfully and not passively.

**Protocol analysis of suicide notes.** Leenaars, who is considered a prominent figure in suicide notes research, was the first to introduce “protocol analysis” (Leenaars, 1988). The term is used to refer to an approach of analysis in which statements describing the potential content of suicide notes, collected from previous research studies of suicide notes, are matched against the content of a corpus of suicide notes to examine the presence or the absence of these statements.

In his book, Leenaars (1988) chose a total of 100 protocol statements from ten prominent suicidologists such as Freud, Menninger, and Shneidman. These statements were manually matched against the original Shneidman and Farberow’s (1957) suicide notes corpus. Five out of the 100 protocol statements were found to occur in the corpus of suicide notes and these five statements also distinguished genuine from simulated suicide notes. Those five protocol statements were concerned with (a) communicating flight from something such as pain or danger; (b) expressing emotions of deprivation and/or distress; (c) communicating adult trauma such as poor health; (d) expressing contradictions and attitudes; (e) implying that the suicidal person’s personality is weak and underdeveloped.

Some subsequent studies of suicide notes followed the protocol analysis proposed by Leenaars (1988) (e.g., Bauer et al., 1997; Leenaars, de Wilde, Wenckstern, & Kral, 2001; O’Connor et al., 1999). However, these studies, including Leenaars’s (1988), examined the language of suicide notes in the light of pre-existing categories and theories. The analysis mainly consisted of grouping the linguistic expressions into theory-based classifications which described the personality characteristics of the suicidal individual.

**Grounded theory approach to suicide notes.** So far, grounded theory approach has been adopted in some of the studies of suicide notes (e.g., Coster & Lester, 2013; McClelland et al., 2000; Olson, 2005). These research studies used coding, that is, a method for analyzing qualitative data which involves assigning a code, that is, “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3) as one of the techniques of grounded theory methodology. Codes capture the meaning of the data and are used as a baseline for “pattern detection, categorizing, theory building, and other analytical processes” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). The similar codes are grouped together into categories and then into themes or concepts that help the researcher reach a theory that best describes what the data contain (Saldaña, 2013). Grounded theory studies of suicide notes (e.g., Coster & Lester, 2013; McClelland et al., 2000) analyzed suicide notes with no presumptions. Coster and Lester (2013) used coding to analyze 86 suicide notes and applied statistical analysis after concepts and categories have emerged from the data. McClelland et al. (2000) also analyzed suicide notes using a grounded theory approach to examine how blame is negotiated and constructed in the language used in suicide notes.

Previous research on suicide notes (e.g., Leenaars, 1988; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957) has tended to focus on applying psychological categories to the language used in suicide notes and validating psychological theories through the analysis of the linguistic expressions found in the notes; thus, these approaches are in a way a “pattern imposing” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 40) technique. Grounded theory approach is rather a “pattern seeking” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 40) approach to the analysis of data, wherein the theory emerges from the data itself. McClelland et al. (2000) invited other researchers from different disciplines to apply a grounded theory approach to

suicide notes research since previous methods imposed psychological categories and, consequently, missed relevant information and valuable insights.

Suicide notes are viewed as *acts of communication* (McClelland et al., 2000; Sanger & Veach, 2008) in which language is used to perform actions and construct relationships rather than only being descriptions of what is inside the suicidal mind, that is, how the suicidal individual thinks and what psychological factors or illnesses contributed to the act.

McClelland et al. (2000) also assert that finding reasons for suicide in suicide notes are likely to be an overestimated assumption made by psychologists since suicide notes are socially constructed by the note writer, and contain linguistic expressions that are connected to the social relationships of the individual and others. The explanations provided in the note may not necessarily be the true reasons for the act. McClelland et al. encouraged other researchers to interpret the linguistic expressions in suicide notes in a social framework and maintained that the language of suicide notes is dependent on and affected by the “communicational context” (p. 228), that is, the audience to whom the note is written for or the addressee.

### **Motivation for the Study**

As discussed in the literature review above, research on suicide notes has examined several aspects such as effects of age and gender on the language of suicide notes, differences in the content of suicide notes according to completers’ or attempters’ status, themes and emotions in suicide notes, and the use of pronouns. Literature on suicide notes is mostly limited to the field of psychology. The studies in psychology, which have explored suicide notes language, use psychological theories as the main framework and are mainly conducted to validate psychological theories and use the results to prevent future suicides. While the aforementioned research studies of suicide notes have been extensive and have offered interesting findings, they

have largely focused on the micro-level of linguistic expressions in suicide notes. These studies did not examine suicide notes from a genre studies perspective.

The present study aims to explore the communicative purpose (s) of suicide notes through ESP genre analysis. Although some literature is available on the communicative goals of suicide notes (e.g., Prokofyeva, 2013; Shneidman, 1985), the basis for assigning the communicative purpose(s) is not established on the theoretical approach this study relies on. In the ESP genre analysis, the communicative purpose of the genre in question is not used as a starting point in the investigation. Genre analysis is used to determine the communicative purpose(s) of a text through an explanation of the communicative purposes texts serve and is not only captured on the surface-level, as previous studies of suicide notes have done. The communicative purpose(s) will be “a long-term outcome” of the analysis (Lassen, 2006, p. 505). Such an approach follows Askehave and Swales’s (2001) recommendation discussed earlier, in which they propose that genre purpose(s) is confirmed after the genre analysis have been conducted.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presented an overview of previous research on suicide notes, including the various approaches to the analysis and some of the methods used. It also described the importance of this study in light of the literature on the analysis of suicide notes. The next chapter describes the methods employed in the study to analyze suicide notes using the ESP genre approach.

## Chapter Four

### Methods

This chapter begins by providing an outline of the pilot study I conducted prior to writing this thesis, followed by a description of the data used in this study and the two analytical frameworks employed: Swales's (1990) rhetorical move/step analysis and Bhatia's (1993, 2004) process for analyzing unfamiliar genres. Subsequently, it illustrates the data coding including a report on inter-coder reliability. Then, it describes data analysis methods with examples from the corpus of suicide notes.

#### Pilot Study

In Summer 2014, prior to writing this thesis, I carried out a pilot study which served as a starting point to a broader investigation of suicide notes in the ESP genre tradition. The pilot study served as an exploratory stage for my research questions; thus, I selected a small dataset to answer my initial research questions. My research questions were:

1. Is there a shared communicative purpose in suicide notes?
2. What are the moves and the steps that are present in suicide notes?

The pilot study investigated a dataset of 10 suicide notes from Shneidman and Farberow's (1957) corpus. To answer the initial research questions, the analysis was conducted in the following way: the suicide notes were coded based on the communicative purpose that each segment in the note served. The communicative purpose of a segment was defined as what each segment does in the text. For example, *I can't find my place in life* (see Appendix A) was defined as a segment that functions to provide reasons/justification for the act of suicide.

The findings of the pilot study showed that suicide notes might share a rhetorical structure (i.e., similar moves and steps). The insights obtained from the small-scale pilot study

provided a motivation for me to pursue a larger-scale investigation. I decided to examine a larger corpus of suicide notes to be able to draw conclusions about their rhetorical structure, communicative purpose(s), and the kind of genre they constitute, that is, whether they are an “open” genre (Swales & Feak, 2000) or a private or “occluded” genre (Swales, 1996).

### **Data Description**

The data comprises 86 real suicide notes: (a) the “classic” Shneidman and Farberow (1957) corpus of 33 published suicide notes, written between 1945 and 1954 by white males who were born in the USA and whose age ranged between 25 and 59 years old; (b) a published corpus of 53 suicide notes (Leenaars, 1988) from the archives of the Coroner’s office in Los Angeles County, with 33 suicide notes written by males and 20 suicide notes written by females between 1983 and 1984. The notes were matched with the same age range as the first corpus (25-59 years old). The corpus of 20 females’ suicide notes includes all the suicide notes that females in the age range of 25-59 years old left at that period. Table 1 illustrates the corpora used in this study. All the suicide notes in this study (n=86) are written by the individuals who completed suicides. The 10 suicide notes analyzed in the pilot study are included.

Table 1

#### *Breakdown of the Suicide Notes Corpora*

Source	Notes	Gender	Time Frame	Age Range
Shneidman and Farberow (1957)	33	Male	1945-1954	25-59
Leenaars (1988)	33	Male	1983-1984	25-59
	20	Female	1983-1984	25-59
Total	86			

All the suicide notes included in this study are reproduced verbatim from the published sources (Leenaars, 1988; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957) as they were written by the decedents, with the spelling and punctuation errors intact. Because of privacy issues, the original authors who compiled the corpora (Leenaars, 1988; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957) anonymized the suicide notes excluding the names of individuals, places, addresses, and phone numbers. In terms of length, the 86 suicide notes varied in length between a minimum of 7 words and a maximum of 899 words.

In the interest of obtaining useful and representative findings of the rhetorical structure of genuine suicide notes and because investigating the rhetorical structure of simulated suicide notes is beyond the scope of this research study, the 33 simulated suicide notes available from Shneidman and Farberow (1957) were excluded from the corpus.

### **The Analytical Frameworks**

To investigate the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, I employed a combination of two analytical approaches, basing the data analysis on the methods developed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993, 2004). First, I discuss how the rhetorical move/step analysis (Swales, 1990) is followed in this study, including (a) the description of the units of analysis and identification of moves and (b) the identification of move boundaries. Second, I discuss the seven-stage process used for the analysis of unfamiliar genres proposed by Bhatia (1993, 2004) and show how the stages were adapted and applied to the analysis of the corpus of suicide notes. The last section includes the validation of the move coding and the steps and data analysis procedures illustrated with fully coded texts.

In the case of move/step analysis of suicide notes, the CARS model proposed by Swales (1990, 2004) and discussed in Chapter 2 cannot be used as a baseline model. As discussed above,

the CARS model was developed for research article introductions (Del Saz Rubio, 2011; Joseph et al., 2014; Samraj, 2002; Swales, 1990), and suicide notes are not academic texts, which are written in a social situation that significantly differs from that in which article introductions are written. Rather, the method of the rhetorical move/step analysis is used in this thesis to unpack and describe the macro structure of suicide notes (e.g., Freiermuth, 2011; Ondimu, 2014; Upton & Cohen, 2009). The analysis examines the text segments (moves and steps) in suicide notes and their communicative purposes in order to describe a move/step structure of these texts.

Once the communicative purposes of the moves have been established and labelled to reflect the purpose of each text segment, further analysis is conducted to identify the communicative purpose(s) of suicide notes.

### **Units of Analysis and the Identification of Moves**

The unit of analysis in this study is a move defined as a meaningful segment of text (Connor, 2000; Connor & Mauranen, 1999; Nguyen & Miller, 2012) which expresses a single communicative purpose. Steps are defined as sub-units that constitute a move.

The criterion for identifying a move is its communicative purpose which contributes to the overall purpose of the text (Akar & Louhiala-Salminen, 1999; Bhatia, 1993; Parodi, 2014; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013). Moves were coded by asking the following question: what does the unit do, that is, what is its communicative purpose? Steps, in turn, are those smaller units that build a move and are distinguished on the basis of how the move is realized.

### **Move Boundaries**

How a move boundary is determined is based not only on the communicative purpose the move achieves in a text, but also on the content of the move (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Ding, 2007; Halleck & Connor, 2006; Lorés, 2004; Nathan, 2013; Paltridge, 1994; Swales, 2004). Hence,

identifying the boundaries of moves depends on the function the move serves as well as on the linguistic clues that include “discourse markers (connectors and other metatextual signals), marked themes, tense and modality changes, and introduction of new lexical references” (Connor & Mauranen, 1999, p. 52).

It has been observed that suicide notes are characterized by an unstructured form (Marcińczuk, Zaśko-Zielińska, & Piasecki, 2011; Olson, 2005) and do not include a wide-range of linguistic clues that are usually found in academic writing such as *to sum up*, *first*, *consequently*, which indicate shifts of the communicative purpose of a text segment. Many suicide notes in the corpus contain grammatical errors such as punctuation, or do not contain any punctuation at all. The grammatical and punctuation errors in suicide notes might be due to the emotional nature of suicide and the fact that these notes are written before the act of killing oneself (Marcińczuk et al., 2011; Nashef, 2010; O’Connor & Leenaars, 2004). There are few linguistic clues to clearly signal the beginning and the end of a sentence in suicide notes, which calls for a need to define and assign moves and steps on the basis of complete ideas, meaning and function (Pho, 2008, 2009; Swales, 2004). The analysis also follows Pho’s (2008, 2009) method of realizing the moves based on a top-down approach, by first identifying the function of each move in the text, and describing the steps within the moves, then, move to investigate the typical linguistic realizations of the moves in suicide notes.

The second analytical framework this study relied on is the seven-stage process for analyzing unfamiliar genres suggested by Bhatia (1993, 2004), discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 14-16). The process was considered and applied to the analysis of suicide notes as follows:

1. Placing the text in a situational context: the context in which suicide notes were written was not available. The only data I had access to were the texts of suicide notes with some

of the demographic information such as age and gender. This lack of contextual clues is a limitation for the present study. At this point, the only study I know of, which considers the context of suicide notes is Giles's (2007), in which she examined background information from inquest files that include many sources such as coroner's reports, statements taken from family members or witnesses, and other writing that belonged to the note writer and that is related to the act of suicide.

2. Surveying the literature: conducting a literature review on the analysis of suicide notes was an important step as it offered insights about the methods and approaches (e.g., content analysis, qualitative thematic analysis, grounded theory) used to analyze the linguistic expressions in suicide notes (see Chapter 3).
3. Refining the context: this step was done by deducing the writer of each note and the intended audience to whom the note was written from the text of the note, where possible.
4. Selecting a corpus for the analysis: the corpora of suicide notes were available publicly.
5. Examining the rules and conventions of language use: as observed by Olson (2005) and Tuckman and Ziegler (1966), the writer of a suicide note has no defined norms to guide him/her about what to write in the note. The lack of norms and conventions guiding the suicide note writing makes it difficult to examine the situational context as suggested by Bhatia (1993), compared to academic or professional genres that usually have defined conventions for writing, such as research articles, research article introductions, and job application letters (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990).
6. Conducting linguistic analysis: I chose to investigate the structural organization of the texts, that is, the move/step structure to establish the rhetorical structure of suicide notes.

After moves and steps were identified, I observed how the moves are realized lexico-grammatically. Two features were discovered that were distinct in some moves: (a) verb form, and (b) self-reference pronouns and pronouns that referred to others.

7. Consulting another analyst: I checked the coding of the moves and the steps in a sub-sample of suicide notes with two colleagues. An inter-coder reliability of .90 agreement was achieved. The inter-coder reliability is discussed below.

Bhatia (2004) also proposed that ethnographic analysis can be useful to explore unfamiliar genres. In analyzing the current corpus of suicide notes, the ethnographic analysis was not possible because of the suicidal act that had been committed after the note was written and because of the nature of the corpus (i.e., anonymized, written long time ago), which prevented me from locating relatives of the note writers. Thus, conducting interviews or studying people involved in these notes as writers or readers was not possible.

### **Inter-Coder Reliability**

Reliability is the degree to which codes generated by one coder are similar to the codes assigned by different coders (Dörnyei, 2007). Inter-coder reliability is calculated to show consistency of assigned codes when multiple coders analyze a set of data and can be computed by many formulas (Saldaña, 2013). Establishing reliability in qualitative research is important as it offers feedback to the researcher from other sources and establishes trustworthiness of the findings (Dörnyei, 2007; Saldaña, 2013).

To calculate the extent of agreement of assigned moves and steps in suicide notes, randomly selected samples of each corpus were coded separately by two coders who are second year Master's students in the Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies program. The coders were familiar with the move/step genre analysis as it is used in this study.

The two coders were not provided with any framework of moves and steps to apply to the samples as they were required to independently code the samples and generate their own labels for the moves and steps, as well as assign move boundaries in suicide notes. The two coders and I discussed the labels of moves and steps in the samples and the assigned boundaries of moves. Any problems or ambiguities in coding were discussed until an agreement was reached on the code assignment as well as on the coded moves and steps.

Given the nature of the data analysis method, that is, rhetorical move/step analysis, the most common index used to calculate the level of agreement is *Kappa* value ( $\kappa$ ) (Biber et al., 2007; Crookes, 1986; Feng, 2014; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Saldaña, 2013). This particular index calculates chance-corrected agreement (Cohen, 1960) between two coders. Having three coders in the study, the level of agreement was computed as follows: first, the agreement between me and the first coder was calculated, and then the agreement between me and the second coder was calculated. An average of pairwise agreement (Conger, 1980) was computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The achieved level of agreement was ( $\kappa = .90$ ). As Saldaña (2013) observes, an inter-coder reliability range between 80-90% is considered satisfactory as evidence of reliability.

### **Data Analysis**

I examined each text segment in the 86 genuine suicide notes and identified the communicative purpose that each segment serves. For example, the text segment *Dearest Mary* is communicating to whom the note is addressed, and the name *Bill* at the end of the note is functioning to close the note (see Appendix A). Each text segment that expressed a specific communicative function was classified as a move and the building elements of each move were identified as the steps used to realize its communicative function.

I calculated the percentage of occurrence (Swales, 1990) of each move across the three corpora (frequency and percentage are used interchangeably in the research on move analysis [e.g., Tessuto, 2015; Upton, 2002]. For consistency, I use percentage of occurrence to refer to the number of times a move occurred across the corpus). Calculating the percentage of occurrence allows for the identification of *obligatory* moves that occur in all the texts, expected, or *quasi-obligatory*, moves that occur in most of the texts, and *optional* moves that occur in less than half of the texts (Joseph et al., 2014; Swales, 1990). To calculate the percentage of occurrence, I divided the number of instances of the occurrence of a move in the notes (the move is counted as one even if it occurs more than once in one note, the pattern of reoccurrence is referred to as *move cycles*, discussed below) by the total number of the notes in each corpus, and then that number was multiplied by a hundred to give the percentage of the move occurrence across each corpus.

The moves were categorized based on the percentage of occurrence in the corpus (see below). The infrequently occurring moves (i.e., structural moves), although not occurring across the three corpora, are important to include when analyzing a specific genre because these textual elements describe the structure of the genre in question (Connor & Maurantan, 1999; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013) and contribute to the overall communicative purpose of the genre (Upton, 2002).

Following Joseph et al. (2014), the percentage of occurrence of a move determines if the move is *obligatory*, *quasi-obligatory* or *optional*. More specifically, an *obligatory* move would appear in 100% of the examined texts while a *quasi-obligatory* move would appear in the examined texts with a percentage of occurrence that ranges between 51% and 99%. An *optional* move occurs in half or less of the examined texts. Many researchers (e.g., Lim, 2010; Loudermilk, 2007; Parodi, 2014; Soler-Monreal, Carbonell-Olivares, & Gil-Salom, 2011;

Tessuto, 2015; Upton, 2002; Yang & Allison, 2003) who conducted ESP move/step analysis on different genres rely on the percentage of occurrence of moves mentioned above to determine the *obligatory*, *quasi-obligatory* and *optional* moves in a genre.

Drawing on the percentage of occurrence of moves suggested by Joseph et al. (2014), any move in this analysis that occurred in less than half of the texts was considered *optional* and not *obligatory* in the move/step model being developed. Based on the percentage of occurrence of the moves and steps in each corpus, a proposed rhetorical move/step model was devised.

Each text was coded with an alpha-numerical code which is indicated at the end of each example. I used the following abbreviations to refer to the corpus from which the text is taken: *S&F* refers to Shneidman and Farberow (1957) corpus in Appendix A, *LM* refers to Leenaars (1988) male corpus in Appendix B, and *LF* refers to Leenaars (1988) female corpus in Appendix C. A code such as #10, *S&F* refers to the tenth note in Appendix A from Shneidman and Farberow (1957) corpus. The following examples in Figures 1, 2, and 3 present three fully coded texts (one from each corpus) with the identified moves in bold on the left of each note.

<b>&lt;Addressing a recipient&gt;</b>	<i>Dearest Mary.</i>
<b>&lt;Saying goodbye&gt;</b>	<i>This is to say goodbye.</i>
<b>&lt;Justifying suicide&gt;</b>	<i>I have not told you because I did not want you to worry, But I have been feeling bad for 2 years, with my heart. I knew that if I went to a doctor I would lose my job. I think this is best for all concerned.</i>
<b>&lt;Expressing intent to commit suicide&gt;</b>	<i>I am in the car in the garage.</i>
<b>&lt;Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death&gt;</b>	<i>Call the police but please don't come out there.</i>
<b>&lt;Expressing love&gt;</b>	<i>I love you very much darling.</i>
<b>&lt;Signing off&gt;</b>	<i>Goodbye,</i> <i>Bill</i>
	#3, S&F, Appendix A

Figure 1. A fully coded text from S&F corpus

<Justifying suicide>	<i>I can't handle the responsibility of life. I have tried to cope with the pressures but find that I just can't do it.</i>
<Apologizing>	<i>I'm sorry to leave behind those people I love – Mary, Jane, Joe, John, my mother, sisters, niece and nephews –</i>
<Expressing hope>	<i>I hope they find peace and happiness in this difficult life.</i>
<Justifying suicide>	<i>I've tried to make it and failed – just can't get it together anymore! This terrible depression keeps coming over me and I can't bear feeling so bad.</i>
<Thanking>	<i>Thanks to the people who tried to help me</i>
<Justifying suicide>	<i>but I became beyond help!</i>
<Signing off>	<i>Bill Smith</i>

#17, LM, Appendix B

Figure 2. A fully coded text from LM corpus

<Thanking>	<i>So many people – have loved me + tried to help – Thank you–</i>
<Justifying suicide>	<i>but I couldn't pull that together to let it be enough -I have too much anger to face – I can't do it</i>
<Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death>	<i>Will All my possessions go to my mother- + my sister Selling my car should pay off outstanding debts to (X) Counseling Service Master Charge – (X) Bank Student Loan All other possessions are paid for</i>
<Signing off>	<i>Mary Smith SS# _____</i>

#10, LF, Appendix C

Figure 3. A fully coded text from LF corpus

The analysis also investigated the patterns of occurrence of moves in suicide notes. This includes *move cycles* (Pho, 2008; Pinto dos Santos, 2002; Santos, 1996) and *move flexibility* (Bhatia, 1993). Each is explained below:

- *Move cycles*: refers to the reoccurrence of a move for a second time in one text.
- *Move flexibility*: refers to the order in which the moves occur and to using all or some of the moves identified in a rhetorical structure (Bhatia, 1993).

After the moves in suicide notes have been identified, each move was examined to investigate how the steps within it are realized. For example, I examined how the *addressing a recipient* move was realized across the corpora of suicide notes. Three steps were identified within this move, which include (a) providing the name(s) of the recipient (e.g., *Mary*); (b) providing salutation (e.g., *Honey*); (c) providing the name(s) of the recipient and salutation (e.g., *Dear Jane*) (see Appendix A, B, & C for the full corpora of suicide notes).

Only after having identified the moves and the steps in suicide notes following a top-down approach (Biber et al., 2007; Pho, 2008, 2009), did I understand that some moves are characterized by specific linguistic features (i.e., grammatical realizations). These features also function to fulfill the communicative purpose of a move in a genre. Specific salient features found in some moves included verb forms and self-reference pronouns and pronouns that referred to others. These features are discussed in the next chapter.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter described the methods used in the study. It reported on the pilot study conducted prior to this thesis, provided a description of the data used in this research study, and illustrated the analytical frameworks used including Swales's (1990) and Bhatia's (1993, 2004) methods of genre analysis. It described the units of analysis, identification of moves, and move

boundaries, in addition to the seven-stage process for analyzing unfamiliar genres (Bhatia, 1993, 2004). The chapter also reported on the inter-coder reliability calculation and data analysis procedures, illustrated by examples of fully coded texts from the corpus of suicide notes.

The findings of the study are presented and discussed in Chapter 5 and 6.

## Chapter Five

### Research Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are divided into two chapters. This chapter reports on the types of moves and steps present in the analyzed corpus of suicide notes (Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Swales, 1990). No 100% *obligatory* moves were identified in the corpus; however, *quasi-obligatory* moves with a high percentage of occurrence have been identified. This chapter first defines all the *quasi-obligatory* moves found in suicide notes. Second, the types of moves and steps are discussed, illustrated by examples from each corpus and in relation to the literature review of this study. Next, the structural moves found in less than half of the texts are presented with their percentage of occurrence. I also discuss the structural moves in relation to previous findings of suicide notes research and provide examples from the current corpus.

Chapter 6 answers the research questions posited earlier in the study (Chapter 1) based on the findings of the analysis and proposes a rhetorical structure of suicide notes based on the genre analysis conducted. A discussion of the communicative purpose(s) and the genre of suicide notes follows.

#### Quasi-Obligatory Moves in Suicide Notes

Table 2 shows the most recurrent moves that were identified in more than half of the texts. The definition (meaning) of each move is presented and accompanied by examples from the analyzed corpora. These moves were identified in more than 51% of the texts, which suggests that they are *quasi-obligatory* (Joseph et al., 2014). A possible reason for the absence of 100% obligatory moves could be due to the small size of the corpora of suicide notes in this study.

Table 2

*Definitions and Examples of the Quasi-Obligatory Moves in the Corpus of 86 Suicide Notes*

Move	Definition	Examples
Addressing a recipient	Indicating the audience of the note	<i>Dear Mary</i> <i>Dearest Darling</i>
Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death	Providing information for others to instruct them what to do after the writer is dead	<i>Call police</i> <i>please take care of my bills</i>
Justifying suicide	Giving reasons for the act	<i>I can't find my place in life</i> <i>I commit suicide because I want to be with my father forever</i>
Expressing love	Communicating love and affection	<i>I love you very much darling</i>
Signing off	Closing/ending the note	<i>John W. Smith,</i> <i>with all my love, Bill</i>

The following section discusses the identified moves presented in Table 2, with all the steps used to realize the moves, accompanied by examples from the corpus of suicide notes.

### **Types of Moves and Steps in Suicide Notes**

Five *quasi-obligatory* moves, including *addressing a recipient*, *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death*, *justifying suicide*, *expressing love*, and *signing off*, and 16 steps have been identified.

Table 3 provides the percentage of occurrence of the five *quasi-obligatory* moves across the three corpora and the total percentage of occurrence in the 86 suicide notes (see Appendix D

for the instances of occurrence of the *quasi-obligatory* moves in the three corpora). It should be noted that the order of the moves presented in the findings does not represent the order of occurrence of the moves in the texts (comments about the order of the moves will be provided where possible).

Table 3

*Percentage of Occurrence of Quasi-Obligatory Moves across the Three Corpora and the Total Percentage of Occurrence*

Move	S&F Corpus (n=33)	LM Corpus (n=33)	LF Corpus (n=20)	Total Percentage
Addressing a recipient	90.9%	60.6%	55%	70.9%
Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death	81.8%	87.8%	95%	88.3%
Justifying suicide	93.9%	84.8%	75%	86%
Expressing love	54.5%	42.4%	45%	47.6%
Signing off	78.7%	69.6%	80%	75.5%

The move *expressing love* has been included and will be discussed in spite of the lower percentage of occurrence (42.4% and 45%) in the *LM* and *LF* corpora compared to the *S&F* corpus (54.5%) in which it is a *quasi-obligatory* move. The total percentage of occurrence equal to 47.6% suggests that the move might be *optional* (Joseph et al., 2014) and will be considered as such in the proposed rhetorical structure of suicide notes in Chapter 6. The steps that were used to realize any of the identified *quasi-obligatory* moves are included in the findings in order to

devise a possible rhetorical move/step model that closely captures the schematic structure of suicide notes and shows all the possible steps.

The examples introduced in this section are extracts from the suicide notes that are part of the three corpora under analysis. Original spelling has been preserved as obtained from the published sources and each example has a code such as #3, *S&F*, as described in Chapter 4, for the ease of reference to the corpora in Appendix A, B, and C.

The following section describes each of the identified *quasi-obligatory* moves in suicide notes. Henceforth, the total percentage of occurrence of the moves shown in Table 3 is used to explain the percentage of occurrence of the moves across the total corpus of 86 suicide notes.

### **“Addressing a Recipient” Move**

The *addressing a recipient* move is used to indicate the audience for whom the suicide note is written. Suicide notes are usually written for an audience of a friend, parents, children or a partner to read (McClelland et al., 2000). In the 86 suicide notes, 70.9% of the notes (see Table 3) included this move. The move is manifested by three main steps in suicide notes:

(a) Providing the name(s) of the recipient

- *To Mary Johns* (#12 S&F)
- *To Tom, Betty, John* (#16 S&F)
- *Mary* (#1, LM)
- *Joe* (#16, LM)
- *Hello Jane* (#6, LF)
- *Jane, Sue, Joe, John* (#15, LF)
- *Bill* (#16, LF)

(b) Providing salutation

- *Honey* (#5, S&F)
- *Dearest darling* (#11, S&F)
- *Honey* (#9, LF)
- *My Darlings* (#15, LF)

(c) Providing the name(s) of the recipient and salutation

- *Dearest Mary* (#3, S&F)
- *Dear Mother and Mary* (#10, S&F)
- *Mary Darling* (#14, S&F)
- *Dear Joe* (#26, LM)
- *Dear Mom and Dad* (#28, LM)
- *Dear Jane* (#5, LF)
- *Dear Jane, Sue, John, Tony* (#20, LF)

The analysis shows that the *addressing a recipient* move could occur as a first move in suicide notes. It also could appear several times in suicide notes, suggesting that the move is cyclic. An example is provided in Figure 4 with the move underlined:

*My dearest family:* *I am terribly sick and it is all my fault. I blame no one but myself. I know it is going to go hard with Tommy and Sister. Please see that Tommy gets a Mickey Mouse Watch for his birthday. Helen I am counting on you to take care of Mother. Please do not follow in my fottsteps.*

*Mary my darling* *I know you did everything possible to avoid this, but please forgive me, as I think it was the only way out. God forgive me and help take care of my family.*

#22, S&F, Appendix A

Figure 4. Example of the cyclicity of the "addressing a recipient" move

Shneidman and Farberow (1960) included “addressee of suicide note” in their list of content categories that they used to investigate suicide notes written by individuals from different socio-economic levels. Darbonne (1969) adopted the list of content categories from Shneidman and Farberow (1960) but did not develop the category of “addressee of suicide note” further in his analysis, nor did he introduce any findings that might be compared to the finding of the present study.

The identified move *addressing a recipient* can be compared to the finding of Prokofyeva’s (2013) study, in which she indicates that the structure of suicide notes includes a “component” of addressee. The addressee can be explicitly identified by the writer of the note by providing a name(s) or can be implied or generalized, such as *to whom it may concern*.

#### **“Giving Instructions to Others about What to do after the Writer’s Death” Move**

The writers of the notes provided different instructions to the survivors as to what to do after they die or in the future. The move was found to occur in 88.3% of the notes (see Table 3).

Five steps are used to realize this move:

(a) Notifying or calling someone

- *Notify – Anne M. Jones, 100 Main St., Los Angeles, tel. BA 00000 (#1, S&F)*
- *Notify my kin by mail. Call Georgia St. Hosp. Ambulance. (#6, S&F)*
- *Please notify my wife Mary Smith Phone BA 00000 (#1, LM)*
- *please call my children first (#18, LM)*
- *call Sherrif [sic] (#30, LM)*
- *call paramedics (#) (#15, LF)*
- *Mom I want you to contact John for me (#8, LF)*

(b) Asking to take care of someone or of business matters

- *Please be good to little Betty, our daughter* (#7, S&F)
- *Please take care of my bills. Tell Tom I made enough money for him. He can take care of my small bills* (#12, S&F)
- *Be good to your mother girls* (#18, S&F)
- *Please take care of my affairs* (#4, LM)
- *MOM PLEASE SELL THE BIKE AND PAY JANE \$2000 I OWE HER MORE BUT THAT ALL I GOT* (#13, LM)
- *Take Care of Yourself* (#5, LF)
- *please leave \$5000 for Jane and \$5000 for Sue* (#17,LF)
- *Take care of yourself, and please stay healthy and live a happy life!* (#20, LF)

(c) Asking not to notify someone about the suicide or not to allow others to see the decedent's body after the suicide has taken place

- *Please don't let my brother know how or why I died. To her [sic] it must be an accident [sic]* (#4, S&F)
- *Keep everything quiet as possible. Say I had a heart attack.* (#29, S&F)
- *no news papers [sic]* (#30, LM)
- *Don't let the kids in the bedroom. I'm dead* (#9, LF)
- *DO NOT ENTER* (#15, LF)

(d) Giving instructions concerning the body or funeral

- *My last request is not to be put 6ft. under but burned and my ashes scattered over the mountains.* (#4, S&F)
- *I specifically request that my body be disposed of by cremation.* (#20, S&F)
- *Bury or Burn me as cheap as possible I don't care where.* (#8, LM)

- *Let the VA bury me, I don't care what happens to this body* (#10, LM)
- *don't want Sue to attend my funeral* (#27, LM)
- *Cremate me* (#13, LF)
- *I want to be buried near mama + daddy, not one of the burials at sea, nor cremation.* (#18, LF)

(e) Assigning belongings to specific individuals

- *I leave everything which has all been acquired since we were married to you my darling wife – Mary Smith* (#5, S&F)
- *I Joseph William Smith give ever thing to Henry Jones my car and what ever [sic] I have* (#9, S&F)
- *Jane give all of my possessions to Mary* (#27, LM)
- *All my possessions go to my mother-+ my sister* (#10, LF)
- *I leave any money or possessions left, if any, after debts are paid, to Joe, my brother, and Jane, my therapist, split 50-50* (#13, LF).

The move *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* is characterized by *move flexibility*, that is, it seems to occur in different locations in suicide notes. The move also displays *cyclicity*, occurring more than once in some of the examined notes.

The analysis reveals that in some notes, this move is realized by two steps instead of one, by combining steps (a) and (c) or steps (c) and (d). Examples below illustrate this finding:

- Steps (a) and (c): *call the police <Notifying or calling someone> but please don't come out there <Asking not to allow others to see the decedent's body after the suicide has taken place>* (#3, S&F)

- Steps (d) and (c): *My last request is not to be put 6ft. under but burned and my ashes scattered over the mountains. <Giving instructions concerning the body or funeral> Please don't let my brother know how or why I died. To her [sic] it must be an accident [sic] <Asking not to notify someone about the suicide> (#4, S&F)*

These findings match those obtained in earlier studies, which compared genuine and simulated suicide notes (e.g., Black, 1993; Osgood & Walker, 1959; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957). It was found that instructions for survivors were present in genuine suicide notes. Prokofyeva (2013) included instructions for survivors under the component “culmination”, which also encompassed other expressions such as *asking for forgiveness* or *assigning blame*. Shneidman and Farberow (1960) also pointed out that suicide notes written by less economically advantaged individuals contained instructions to survivors which are mostly concerned with notifying others, disposing the body of the decedent, or taking care of possessions and finishing business matters. Similarly, McClelland et al. (2000) reported that some suicide notes contained instructions for survivors explaining what to do after the writer’s death. Also, the *assigning belongings to specific individuals* step within the move “*giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer’s death*” was usually included under the *will or instructions* category (e.g., Giles, 2007; Jacobs, 1971; Sanger & Veach, 2008; Shneidman & Farberow, 1960).

Jacobs (1971) identified six types of suicide notes: “asking for forgiveness”, “sorry illness”, “not sorry illness”, “direct accusation”, and “will and testament” notes, as well as “notes of instruction”, which provide directions to survivors. Jacobs also observed that, compared to other note types, the “notes of instruction” are brief and do not contain any of the expressions of, for example, asking for forgiveness. However, the analysis of the current corpus of suicide notes indicates that a note may contain both the *asking for forgiveness* move (a less frequent structural

move identified in this corpus, see Table 4) and the *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* move. An example from the corpus is presented in Figure 5 to demonstrate the occurrence of the two moves in one note.

<p>&lt;Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death&gt;</p>	<p><u><i>Please call my children first</i></u></p> <p><i>Can't Take much more Love you all to much gone to see Mary</i></p> <p><i>I can't live without Mary this pain + misery is to much</i></p> <p><i>Love all you kids</i></p>
<p>&lt;Asking for forgiveness&gt;</p>	<p><u><i>forgive me ain't going to Die in Hosp. Like Mom</i></u></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Love Dad</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">#18, LM, Appendix B</p>	

Figure 5. Example showing the co-occurrence of the "giving instructions" move with "asking for forgiveness" move in one note

### “Justifying Suicide” Move

In *justifying suicide* move, the writer of the note provides some of the reasons for the act. The move was identified in 86% of the notes (see Table 3). Five steps have been found to constitute this move, including:

(a) Perceiving suicide as the only/best way out

- *so I am taking the only way out (#5, S&F)*
- *as I think it was the only way out. (#22, S&F)*
- *it seems to be the only way (#26, LM)*
- *This was the only way out for me. (#14, LF)*

(b) Being unable to continue living or cope with life

- *I can't find my place in life. (#1, S&F)*
- *I cannot endure this situation any longer. (# 7, S&F)*
- *I just cannot take it any more (#9, S&F)*
- *I can't go on living like this. (#4, LM)*
- *I can't live without you. (#4, LM)*
- *I can't handle the responsibility of life. I have tried to cope with the pressures but find that I just can't do it. (17, LM)*
- *Can't Take much more (#18, LM)*
- *But there's some core-level spark of life that just isn't there. Despite what's been said about my having "gotten better" lately – the voice in my head tha'ts [sic] driving me crazy is louder than ever. It's way beyond being reached by anyone or anything, it seems. I can't bear it any more. I think there's something psychologically twisted-reversed that has taken over, that I can't fight any more (#1, LF)*
- *I just can't go on like this anymore. The depression and loneliness [sic] are too much for me. I tried to make it and failed (#13, LF)*
- *but I can't go on any more. (#20, LF)*

(c) Presenting relationship failure or problems as reasons for suicide

- *I can't stand being without her. She's something I spoiled myself. (#12, S&F)*
- *For the first time in my life I was really in love, and I thought you were too. I had hopes that you would forget your feelings and we would try to be happy together (#23, S&F)*

- *This is not an easy thing I'm about to do, but when a person makes a few mistakes and later tried to say in his own small way with a small vocabulary that he is sorry for what has happened and promises to remember what has happened and will try to make the old Bill come home again, and do his best to start all over again, and make things at home much better for all concerned, you still refuse to have me when you as well as I know that I can't do it by myself, then there's only one thing to do. (#24, S&F)*
- *I don't understand how all this happened, but you know what, I wish this would never have happened. Jane It hurts me very much. Just thinking of what happened makes me wonder why. I never thought you would do this to me! BABE I miss you. (#6, LF).*

(d) Having health problems/issues

- *I have been feeling bad for 2 years, with my heart. I knew that if I went to a doctor I would lose my job. (#3, S&F)*
- *Don't think badly of me for taking this way out but I can't take much more pain and sickness also I may get to [sic] much pain or so weak that I can't go this easy way. (#8, S&F)*
- *I William Smith Do not want to Live anymore [sic] I am sick. (#5, LM)*
- *I am so tired of feeling sick (#14, LF)*

(e) Suggesting that others will be better off after suicide

- *I think this is best for all concerned (#3, S&F)*
- *There must be something fine for you. (#15, S&F)*

- *Since you are convinced that you are an invalid and no one can help you, I hope my \$3000 insurance will help you to see the truth about yourself and get rid of your mental sickness. (#19, S&F)*
- *You and Joe will be better off this way. (#27, S&F)*

The *justifying suicide* move is characterized by *flexibility* and *cyclicity* in suicide notes, where it can occur in different locations and several times in one note. In addition, an interaction between steps is present, wherein more than one step is used to realize the move in a note. Examples below demonstrate the steps used to realize the move, accompanied by illustrative excerpts from suicide notes:

- Steps (a), (b), and (d): *Don't think badly of me for taking this way out <Perceiving suicide as the only/best way out> but I can't take much more pain and sickness <Being unable to continue living> also I may get to [sic] much pain or so weak that I can't go this easy way <Having health problems/issues> (#8, S&F)*
- Steps (d), (b), and (a): *I am so tired of feeling sick <Having health problems/issues> I cant go on anymore <Being unable to continue living> This was the only way out for me <Perceiving suicide as the only/best way out> (#14, LF)*

Giles (2007) found that some suicide notes contained more than one reason (explanation/justification) for suicide. Several suicide notes in her corpus used a combination of reasons (referred to as steps in the current analysis) to justify the suicidal act.

The existence of the *justifying suicide* move is further supported by Shneidman's (1985) observation that suicide is seen as the best solution by the writer of the note. The current analysis reveals that one of the steps used to realize the *justifying suicide* move is that suicide is the only/best way out. Similarly, Prokofyeva (2013) found that genuine suicide notes contained

reasons for suicide recognized in the “introduction” (p. 28) component. She also noted that the authors of suicide notes presented suicide as “the only option” (p. 28) in order to justify their act.

The step *being unable to continue living or cope with life* has also been found in previous studies on the linguistic expressions in suicide notes. For example, Shneidman and Farberow (1960) examined the reasons for suicide explicitly stated in suicide notes and found that most economically advantaged individuals stated in their suicide notes the reasons for the act such as expressions of the inability to go on or being tired of life.

The *presenting relationship failure/problems as reasons for suicide* step can be best compared to the theme *failed relationship* in Ioannou and Debowska’s (2014) analysis of genuine and simulated suicide notes. This theme was found to characterize genuine suicide notes, in which the reason for suicide is stated as having troubles in a relationship.

Several content analysis studies of the language of suicide notes (Jacobs, 1971; Olson, 2005; Shneidman & Farberow, 1960) also found that suicide notes might contain illness or health problems expressions stated as reasons for suicide.

McClelland et al. (2000) also confirmed that some of the expressions used in suicide notes referred to the reasons for the act. The authors observed that the note writers justified the suicidal act by perceiving it as the best solution, having an illness, being unable to continue living, and losing or breaking up a relationship. The themes that have emerged in McClelland et al.’s (2000) findings can be clearly linked to the steps identified in this analysis as used within the *justifying suicide* move.

### **“Expressing Love” Move**

This move was identified in the first corpus (Shneidman & Farberow, 1957) as a *quasi-obligatory* move with a percentage of occurrence of 54.5% (see Table 3). However, it was not

identified in the other two corpora (Leenaars's, 1988 corpus of males and females suicide notes) as a *quasi-obligatory* move because the percentage of this occurrence indicated that it occurred in less than half of the texts (for percentages see Table 3). Therefore, it can be considered as an *optional* move that the writer chooses to include in the suicide note, depending on his/her communicative purpose. The *expressing love* move was mainly realized through one step: using the expression *I love you*. This expression was used to realize the move, with conveying varying degrees of love such as *with all my heart*, *very much*, *so much*, and *forever*. Some examples are:

- *I love you very much darling* (#3, S&F)
- *Boys I love you* (#8, LM)
- *I love you so much* (#2, LF).

Although this move had a low percentage of occurrence in the *LM* and *LF* corpora (42.4% and 45%, respectively), the notes that had the move *expressing love* used the expressions of love repetitively throughout the note, which implies that this move is cyclical. Similar to the identified *quasi-obligatory* moves, the *expressing love* move has a flexible order in suicide notes and can occur in several locations.

This finding of the present research study mirrors those of the previous studies that have examined the linguistic content of suicide notes. For example, Ioannou and Debowska (2014), analyzing Shneidman and Farberow's (1957) corpus of 33 genuine suicide notes, showed that genuine suicide notes are characterized by expressions of love. As well, McClelland et al. (2000) found that the writers of suicide notes used expressions of love in order to negotiate and allocate blame. For example, the expression *I love you* indicated that the authors of suicide notes "have not failed in the fundamental requirements of a relationship" (McClelland et al., 2000, p. 230). Delgado (2013) also found that 89% of the 27 suicide notes, collected from the coroner's office

in Ohio between 2000-2009, included love expressions. These findings indicate that the *expressing love* move is frequently used in genuine suicide notes.

### “Signing Off” Move

The *signing off* is a move used to end the suicide note. Not all the notes in the corpora included this move, but the move was present in 75.5 % of suicide notes (see Table 3) and was the final move in 60.4% of these. Two steps were identified in this move:

(a) Providing the name and/or ending salutation (Upton, 2002) of the note writer

- *J. William Smith* (#1, S&F)
- *Bill* (#14, S&F)
- *Dad* (#2, LM)
- *Bill* (#11, LM)
- *Your Son Bill* (#3, LF)
- *Mary* (#7, LF)

(b) Giving love with the name of the note writer

- *All the love I have, Bill* (#6, S&F)
- *love Bill* (#8, LM)
- *Love Mary* (#18, LF)

Giving love in this step is not identical to the move *expressing love* discussed above in the sense that expressions of love used in the previously described move are functioning to express the feelings of the note writer by explicitly stating the emotions of love. “Giving love” at the end of the note is a way of ending and signing off the note. Its communicative purpose is to end the note. For this reason, “expressing love by explicit statements of love” is categorized as a move while “giving love” at the end of the note is considered as a step within the move whose

communicative purpose is to end the note. The *signing off* move occurred mostly at the end of the note. It is also noted that this move reoccurs more than once in some notes (cyclical move). Figure 6 provides an example of a suicide note containing a cyclical use of the *signing off* move (the move is underlined).

<p><i>Jane give all of my possessions to Mary and don't want Sue to attend my funeral.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>Bill</i></u></p> <p><i>Mary Please take this check and withdraw all the money from my account</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Thank you</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>Bill</i></u></p> <p><i>Please pay Joe at (business) \$1400.00 (tel. #)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u><i>Bill</i></u></p> <p><i>The BMW License/ ABCXYZ should be retrieved from (auto shop) across the street and given to Jean when she turns 21 and is not to be sold</i></p> <p><i>My share of the houses should go to Jean and she is to retain full possession until such time that she remarries and at such time of this house that belongs to me should go to alcoholics</i></p> <p><i>Anonamous</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">#27, LM, Appendix B</p>
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Figure 6. An example of the "signing off" move cyclicity

Prokofyeva (2013) argued that the "conclusion" (p. 29) of suicide notes may include different statements such as *saying goodbye* or expressing some last words. However, her findings are not consistent with the findings of this study. Suicide notes in this corpus mostly contained the *signing off* move (75.5%) as a closing move. Although *saying goodbye* move, a less frequent move identified in the analysis of the corpus (see Table 4), was identified in the current corpus of suicide notes, it was not always functioning to end the suicide note.

### Flexibility of Quasi-Obligatory Moves in Suicide Notes

As indicated in Chapter 4, *move flexibility* refers to the sequence or order of the rhetorical moves in texts. It also refers to the moves the writer chooses to include from the range of the identified rhetorical moves, that is, the use of some or all of the *obligatory*, *quasi-obligatory*, or *optional* moves (Bhatia, 1993). After the *quasi-obligatory* moves had been identified, the moves were examined in order to observe the sequence of the moves and whether suicide notes contained all or some of the identified rhetorical *quasi-obligatory* moves.

The sequence of the identified moves varied in the examined corpus of suicide notes. The *addressing a recipient* was the first move in 75.5% of the suicide notes. The move was sometimes preceded by other *quasi-obligatory* moves such as the *justifying suicide* move (4.6%) or the *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* move (3%). In one note, the *addressing a recipient* move occurred in the middle.

The *signing off* move was found to be a final move in 80% of the suicide notes that contained it. In the instances where the *signing off* move was not final, the note would end by the *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* move (12.3%). The *signing off* move occurred in the middle of one note in the current corpus.

The sequence of the moves *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* and *justifying suicide* is not fixed. The *expressing love* move is an *optional* move that can be used based on the communicative purpose the writer wants to achieve in the note and it also occurred in different locations throughout the examined corpus.

Out of the 32 suicide notes that used all the *quasi-obligatory* moves, 12 notes contained the sequence presented in Figure 7.

Move 1 : *Addressing a recipient*  
 Move 2: *Justifying suicide*  
 Move 3: *Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death*  
 Move 4: *Expressing love (optional move)*  
 Move 5: *Signing off*

Figure 7. Sequence of the moves in 12 suicide notes

As for the flexibility of using some or all of the identified moves in suicide notes, 37.2% (32 notes) of the 86 suicide notes contained all the *quasi-obligatory* moves identified in this analysis (sometimes without the *optional* move, *expressing love*), including moves presented in a cyclical pattern, reoccurring more than once in one note.

### **Linguistic Features of the Moves in Suicide Notes**

By examining the linguistic realizations used to achieve communicative purpose of the moves in suicide notes, two distinct features were identified:

- The verbs used in realizing the *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* move. Specifically, the imperative form, the base form of a verb in the present tense without the “-s” ending of the third person singular, such as go, sit, come. The imperative functions to give commands or instructions (Carter & McCarthy, 2006).
- The use of self-reference pronouns and pronouns that referred to others in realizing the *justifying suicide* move. (Self-reference pronouns include *I, me, my, myself, mine*. Pronouns that referred to others are *he, she, they, you, herself, himself, yourself*).

As noted above, the verb form used in the *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* typically was the imperative, including its negative form as in *don't let*. Through the use of imperatives, the writers of the notes can communicate to the survivors their

final instructions, wishes or requests. Figure 8 provides some illustrative examples with the verbs underlined.

- Notify my kin by mail. Call Georgia St. Hosp. Ambulance. (#6, S&F)
- Take Care of Yourself (#5, LF)
- DO NOT ENTER (#15, LF)
- Show Bill how to run the Washer and Dryer, and please help him out as much as you can! Stay with him! (#20, LF)
- Mary Please take this check and withdraw all the money from my account (#27, LM)
- Call the police but please don't come out there (#3, S&F)

Figure 8. Examples of using the imperative in the "giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death" move

Observing the use of self-reference pronouns and pronouns that referred to others in the *justifying suicide* move, it is noted that self-reference pronouns in this move are used to indicate that it is the choice of the writer to commit suicide. The self-reference pronouns also imply that the writer is not assigning blame to others, because the pronouns highlight the agency of the writer in taking the responsibility for the suicidal act. McClelland et al. (2000) pointed out that the authors of suicide notes allocate blame to self and others when providing reasons for the act. The agency, and hence accountability for the act, are reflected in the use of self-blame expressions such as "*I can't go on*" or "*I can't face the future*" (p. 232). Moreover, Roubidoux (2012) also observed that the use of singular first-person pronouns (*I* and *me*) in suicide notes emphasizes the authors' individuality in making the decision to commit suicide without assigning blame to others.

To illustrate the use of self-reference pronouns and pronouns that referred to others in the *justifying suicide* move, extracts from two notes are presented in Figures 9 and 10 with pronouns

highlighted in bold. Figure 9 shows the use of self-reference pronouns and Figure 10 demonstrates the use of pronouns that referred to others.

*This should come as no surprise. **My** eyes have spoken for a long, long time of the distress **I** feel. The self-imposed isolation, the rejection, the failures and frustrations overwhelm **me**. The laughs are all gone and irrationality has control. There is no way to pull **myself** out of the hell where **I**'ve placed **myself**.*

#7, LM, Appendix B

*Figure 9.* An example of the use of self-reference pronouns in the "justifying suicide" move

*The reason for my despondency is that **you**'d prefer the company of almost anyone to mine. 2. **You** told me **you** had nothing to look forward to on week ends [sic]. **You** told me **you** preferred living alone. This led to more sedatives. I have lost the love of my two children. **You** blamed me for **your** vaginal bleeding. **Your** first husband was denied normal sexual intercourse because **you** said it hurt. I received the same accuse. **You** said it hurt even out of wedlock. This **you** cant [sic] help.*

#6, S&F, Appendix A

*Figure 10.* An example of the use of pronouns that referred to others in the "justifying suicide" move

As the first example in Figure 9 shows, the male writer justifies his act by stressing the fact that he was responsible for the failure in his life and takes responsibility for his action using a variety of self-reference pronouns such as *I*, *me*, and *myself*, while in the second example in Figure 10, the writer uses *you* and *your* frequently to give reasons for suicide, that is, relationship failure/problems. A possible explanation for the use of pronouns that referred to others for justifying suicide is that the writer is assigning blame indirectly to others who are considered responsible for the act of suicide.

### Less Frequent Structural Moves in Suicide Notes

Based on the ESP move/step analysis of suicide notes, five *quasi-obligatory* moves were identified and explained in the previous section. Other structural moves that occurred in less than half of the texts are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*List of Less Frequent Structural Moves in Suicide Notes with the Instances and Percentage of Occurrence*

Structural Move	Instances	%	Example
Establishing social relationships	24	27.9	<i>We had a very good Marriage!</i>
Apologizing to others	23	26.7	<i>I'm sorry honey</i>
Asking for forgiveness	16	18.6	<i>Forgive if you can</i>
Saying goodbye	15	17.4	<i>Bye-bye Mary, Betty, and Helen</i>
Providing information	14	16.2	<i>I work at Ford</i>
Expressing intent to commit suicide	13	15.1	<i>When you read this I will be dead</i>
Thanking	13	15.1	<i>thanks for everything</i>
Assigning blame	6	6.9	<i>I blame no one but myself</i>
Giving blessings	5	5.8	<i>God bless you all</i>
Offering help to others	4	4.6	<i>I might be able to do something for him</i>
Expressing happiness	4	4.6	<i>I was happy</i>
Expressing hope	4	4.6	<i>I hope you eventually will find happiness</i>
Suggesting that suicide will be hard on others	4	4.6	<i>Hurting my family is the worst of it</i>
Giving advice	3	3.4	<i>But if I were you I would Move Back</i>
Expressing good wishes for others	3	3.4	<i>I wish you the best of everything</i>
Asking to understand the decision of suicide	2	2.3	<i>I hope you understand why I have done this</i>
Reporting on suicide as if it already happened	2	2.3	<i>I have committed suicide</i>
Expressing regret	1	1.1	<i>I wish I can turn Back time</i>
Expressing fear	1	1.1	<i>Am terrified</i>
Showing anger towards others	1	1.1	<i>If you ever take a drink I hope you drown yourself with it</i>

Twenty structural moves were identified in suicide notes, with percentage of occurrence ranging between 27.9% and 1.1%. Given the low percentage of occurrence which falls below 50%, these moves can be considered *optional* (Joseph et al., 2014). The structural moves had a flexible order and a cyclical pattern in suicide notes, occurring more than once in one note. Most

of the moves are self-explanatory (the move is defined where necessary in the following discussion). As pointed out in Chapter 3, some of the moves in Table 4 were found in the investigation of the linguistic expressions in suicide notes (e.g., Black & Lester, 2003; Chia et al., 2008; Ho et al., 1998; Osgood & Walker, 1959; Sanger & Veach, 2008).

The move *establishing social relationships* in Table 4 refers to expressions used by the writer that point out the joint social relationship between him/her and the addressee. The move is mostly used to construct a positive image of the addressee and refer to issues such as *good marriage, being kind or wonderful*. Some examples are:

- *No man could have asked for a better wife than you have been* (#18, S&F)
- *you have been a good Son* (#20, LF).

This move can be best compared to what Giles (2007) refers to as “a gift for recipients” (p. 140) suicide notes in which the writer positively constructs his/her relationship with the addressee.

The structural move *providing information* (see Table 4) includes two steps:

- Personal information such as the address of the note writer, for example, *I live at 100 Spring St., Los Angeles* (#1, S&F)
- Information related to the act of suicide such as providing the date of the note or previous attempts of suicide, for example, *Given unto my hand this ninth day of June in the year of 1943, A.D., in the city of Los Angeles, California* (#20, S&F)

In accordance with the present results, the structural move *apologizing to others* was also found in previous studies of suicide notes (e.g., Chia et al., 2008; Delgado, 2013; Ioannou & Debowska, 2014; Jacobs, 1971; Prokofyeva, 2013) as were other structural moves identified in this analysis, including *asking for forgiveness* (e.g., Black & Lester, 2003; Chia et al., 2008; McClelland et al., 2000), *saying goodbye* (e.g., Darbonne, 1969; Ioannou & Debowska, 2014;

Shapero, 2011), and *assigning blame* including self and others blame (e.g., McClelland et al., 2000; Nashef, 2010; Pestian et al., 2012; Sanger & Veach, 2008).

### **Summary of the Chapter**

The chapter presented and discussed the types of moves and steps present in the examined corpus of suicide notes. The findings show that suicide notes contain 5 *quasi-obligatory* moves, including: *addressing a recipient, giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death, justifying suicide, expressing love, and signing off*. The chapter also described the less frequent structural moves that occurred in the investigated corpus and discussed the types of moves and steps identified in relation to previous studies on the analysis of suicide notes.

Having discussed the moves and steps identified in suicide notes, in the next chapter I answer the research questions by first presenting a proposed rhetorical move/step model of suicide notes in a format similar to the one proposed by Swales (1990) for research article introductions. Then, I address the sub-purposes of the identified moves in this analysis and the communicative purpose(s) of suicide notes. This is followed by a discussion of the genre of suicide notes based on the findings of this research study and in relation to the ESP genre approach and the literature on suicide notes.

## Chapter Six

### The Genre of Suicide Notes

This chapter discusses the findings of the rhetorical move/step analysis conducted in this study in relation to the theoretical framework and previous research in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the moves and the steps that are present in suicide notes and how consistent the moves/steps are across the selected corpus of suicide notes?
2. Is there a shared communicative purpose in suicide notes and, consequently, do suicide notes constitute a genre as defined by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) within the ESP framework?
3. If suicide notes do constitute a genre, what kind of genre is it?

The first section below answers the first research question. The following two sections address the sub-purposes of the moves identified in suicide notes and the shared communicative purpose(s) of suicide notes. The last section is related to question 3 and addresses the nature of the suicide notes genre viewed from the perspective of the ESP genre approach.

#### A Possible Rhetorical Move/Step Model of Suicide Notes

Based on the ESP genre analysis conducted, a possible rhetorical structure of suicide notes is proposed (cf. Swales, 1990) and presented in Figure 11. The rhetorical structure includes all the *quasi-obligatory* moves and steps found to occur in the corpus of suicide notes. As indicated in chapter 5, the order of the moves is flexible with the move *addressing a recipient* usually situated at the beginning of the note and the move *signing off* at the end of the note. Also, the moves are cyclical and might occur several times in one note. Some of the identified steps are sometimes used in combination in one move, that is, one or more of the steps may be used in one

note. The high percentage of occurrence of these moves (see Table 3) indicates that the moves are consistently present in the majority of suicide notes in the corpus analyzed in the study.

**Move: Addressing a recipient**

Step 1 Providing the name(s) of addressee  
and/or

Step 2 Providing salutation  
and/or

Step 3 Providing the name(s) of addressee and salutation

**Move: Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death**

Step 1 Notifying/calling someone  
and/or

Step 2 Asking to take care of someone or of business matters  
and/or

Step 3 Asking not to notify someone about the suicide or not to allow others  
to see the decedent's body after the suicide has taken place  
and/or

Step 4 Giving instructions concerning the body or funeral  
and/or

Step 5 Assigning belongings to specific individuals

**Move: Justifying suicide**

Step 1 Perceiving suicide as the only/best way out  
and/or

Step 2 Being unable to continue living or cope with life  
and/or

Step 3 Presenting relationship failure or problems as reasons for suicide  
and/or

Step 4 Having health problems/issues  
and/or

Step 5 Suggesting that others will be better off after suicide

**Move: Expressing love (Optional)**

Step Using "I love you" expression with varying degrees of love

**Move: Signing off**

Step 1 Providing the name and/or ending salutation of the note writer  
and/or

Step 2 Giving love with the name of the note writer

*Figure 11.* A proposed rhetorical move/step model of suicide notes

### **Sub-Purposes of the Moves in Suicide Notes**

As evident from the move analysis and the identified moves in the corpus (Figure 11), one of the shared communicative purposes of the rhetorical moves found in suicide notes is to justify the act by giving reasons such as being unable to continue living, failure, or perceiving suicide as the best or only solution. It is encouraging to compare this finding with previous work that has investigated suicide notes. Shneidman (1985) asserted that suicide notes are written to communicate to others that the suicidal individual perceives suicide as the best solution for a problem, which is one of the steps found in the *justifying suicide* move. Other research studies (Olson, 2005; Prokofyeva, 2013; Roubidoux, 2012) provided further evidence in support of the communicative purpose of *justifying suicide*. They asserted that the aims, that is, the communicative purpose, of suicide notes can include, but are not limited to, one of the following: giving reasons for the act of suicide and presenting relationship problems as reasons for suicide. More specifically, Roubidoux (2012) identified several purposes of suicide notes such as “apology, blame, explanation” (p. 34), where by *explanation* she refers to the reasons for the act. These overall purposes of suicide notes have been identified in the current corpus as sub-purposes of the moves. The *apology* and *blame* purposes of suicide notes suggested by Roubidoux (2012) are found to occur in less than half of the texts in the current corpus, while *explanation* (in this analysis it is referred to as *justifying suicide*) is found to occur as a rhetorical move in suicide notes with a percentage of 86%.

Another shared communicative purpose drawn from the analysis conducted in this study is that suicide notes also aim to give instructions concerning several issues such as business, body of the decedent, or notification of others about the suicide. This finding seems to be consistent with other research studies which found instructions to be present in suicide notes

(e.g., Black, 1993; Osgood & Walker, 1959; Sanger & Veach, 2008; Shneidman & Farberow, 1957, 1960). In addition, other studies observed that suicide notes serve the communicative purpose of providing the final wishes, requests, directions, and commands to survivors (e.g., Ho et al., 1998; Leenaars, 1988; Prokofyeva, 2013; Roubidoux, 2012).

### **Communicative Purpose(s) of Suicide Notes**

The sub-purposes of the identified moves can be used to establish the main communicative purpose(s) of suicide notes (Akar & Louhiala-Salminen, 1999; Bhatia, 1993; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013). It can be suggested that the communicative purpose of suicide notes is to convince the reader (audience) that the act of suicide is justifiable. The purpose is achieved through providing reasons for the suicidal act. Some of the suicide notes included more than one purpose such as providing some instructions to the survivors or asking for forgiveness. As stated by Swales (1990) and Askehave and Swales (2001), having sets of communicative purposes in one genre is sometimes possible, as the move analysis conducted in this study demonstrates. The findings of the present study provide evidence that a genre might have multiple communicative purposes, which are only detectable after carrying out a thorough investigation of the rhetorical structure of the genre.

### **The Genre of Suicide Notes**

Suicide notes, as defined earlier, are notes written before the act of suicide (Darbonne, 1969; Ho et al., 1998; Leenaars, 1988). Researchers believe that suicide notes offer true motivations and reasons for the act of suicide (e.g., Canetto & Lester, 1999; Ho et al., 1998). However, it is argued that the reasons for the act of suicide provided by the suicidal individual in suicide notes might not be as simple or as true as they appear (Giles, 2007; Leenaars, 1999; McClelland et al., 2000). Viewing suicide notes as “acts of communication” (McClelland et al.,

2000; Sanger & Veach, 2008) rather than true accounts of what motivated suicide, it is possible to assume that suicide notes function to convince the reader(s) that the act the suicidal individual is about to commit is justifiable. McClelland et al. (2000) asserted that the act of suicide, that is, annihilating one's self, is in itself an unacceptable social act; therefore, the individuals who leave a suicide note could be seen as trying to defend and justify this socially unacceptable act they have chosen by providing reasons and explanations that might or might not be true.

The literature on the analysis of suicide notes suggests that the notes exhibit similarities. For example, Osgood and Walker (1959) examined suicide notes and compared them to ordinary letters to relatives. The authors concluded that suicide notes shared more common language compared to ordinary letters; as well, their analysis revealed that suicide notes did not exhibit greater disorganization than letters, meaning that suicide notes are indeed organized and share a rhetorical structure. Moreover, Samraj and Gawron (2015) concluded their analysis of a suicide notes corpus by stating that similarities (*family resemblance*) were present in suicide notes despite the lack of an apparent discourse community. Additionally, Giles (2007) asserted that suicide notes share commonalities and are considered “purposeful written acts” (p. 116).

Further evidence of similarities in suicide notes is suggested by the findings of this research study. Moves in suicide notes in the analyzed corpus do share sub-purposes as illustrated above and ultimately share communicative purposes (Askehave & Swales, 2001). Although it is believed that the content of suicide notes varies from one note to another, and suicide notes are sometimes considered as unstructured type of communication (Marcińczuk et al., 2011; Olson, 2005; Tuckman & Ziegler, 1966), the present study demonstrated that suicide notes share a rhetorical structure presented in the five *quasi-obligatory* moves: *addressing a recipient, giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death, justifying*

*suicide, expressing love, and signing off.* According to Swales (1990), the moves are communicative events that have a shared set of communicative purposes. It may be concluded that the established rhetorical structure and the communicative purposes of suicide notes in this study point to the existence of a distinctive genre of suicide notes.

Suicide notes are sometimes referred to as letters (e.g., Chia et al., 2008; Leenaars, 1999; O'Connor et al., 1999). Despite the fact that the generic structure of suicide notes, as noted above, shares some of the rhetorical moves found in letters such as beginning with a salutation and ending with a signature (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013; Stanley & Jolly, 2005; Upton, 2002; Upton & Cohen, 2009; Yunxia, 2000), the communicative purposes of suicide notes distinguish them from other kinds of letters and allow me to identify suicide notes as a distinct genre. Furthermore, the communicative events in suicide notes are interactional in nature, and represent communication with an explicit or implied recipient (Sanger & Veach, 2008); however, the generic structure of the notes lacks the move *soliciting response*, an established move in the genre of letters (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013; Yunxia, 2000) that functions to request a response from the reader.

For these reasons, a distinction has to be drawn between the genre of letters and the genre of suicide notes. As the studies discussed above and the current study suggest, suicide notes are distinct from letters and cannot be considered as a sub-genre of letters because as Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (1999) observed, “whereas genres may have similar discourse characteristics, a sub-genre within a genre cannot exist since, by definition, each genre is associated with a different rhetorical situation” (p. 9-10). The research presented in this thesis as well as previous studies (e.g., Artemeva et al., 2014; Giles, 2007; Prokofyeva, 2013; Samraj &

Gawron, 2015; Shapero, 2011) strongly suggest that suicide notes do constitute a genre according to the ESP genre approach.

It can thus be suggested that the core or “typical” genre of suicide notes includes the following macro-structure which consists of all the *quasi-obligatory* moves:

*Addressing a recipient* > *Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer’s death* >  
*Justifying suicide* > *Expressing love* > *Signing off*

Other examples of the genre of suicide notes which do not contain all the above moves or use different optional moves identified in this study (see Table 4) can still qualify as examples/instances of the genre as long as they serve the communicative purpose of the genre (Biber et al., 2007; Paltridge, 1995) based on the *family resemblance* approach (Swales, 1990) that can be applied to genre categorization. Paltridge (1995) emphasizes that categorizing examples of a genre that are not typical should be based on “sufficient similarity” (p. 396). These insights make it justifiable to consider typical suicide notes as containing all or some of the *quasi-obligatory* moves identified in the analysis presented in this thesis, while other “atypical” suicide notes can be considered as examples or instances of the genre based on the shared communicative purpose and other similarities with “typical” suicide notes.

Turning to the discussion of what kind of genre suicide notes constitute, it is important to note that Shapero (2011) was the first to suggest that suicide notes might constitute an “occluded” genre (Swales, 1996) because suicidal individuals writing suicide notes do not usually have access to samples of texts that might help them structure their writing. However, Shapero does not develop or reflect on the concept further in her analysis of suicide notes. Olson (2005) also observes that there is a lack of accessible examples to guide the writers of suicide notes. Few people have access to suicide notes left by individuals who committed suicide;

suicide notes are usually accessible to a limited number of readers, such as the police, coroners' office, court, and some family members who are contacted after the suicidal act, or witnesses who found the body (Shapero, 2011). Limited access to examples and the private nature of the act of suicide and suicide notes suggest that the suicide notes genre is indeed an "occluded" genre and not a public or open one.

Because of the occluded nature of the genre, Olson (2005) suggested that there might not be shared norms or conventions which suicide note writers rely on when they compose the notes. However, the analysis conducted in this research study has demonstrated that at least some suicide notes do share a communicative purpose and a similar rhetorical structure.

An important issue that remains to be addressed in this discussion is the issue of discourse community, which is one of the key concepts in the ESP genre approach. As discussed in chapter 2, the original concept was proposed by Swales (1990); however, only three years later, Swales (1993) observed that "The 'true' discourse community may be rarer and more esoteric than I once thought" (p. 695). Identifying a discourse community of the suicide notes genre is problematic. Most often, individuals who write suicide notes do not know each other and do not communicate with each other. The writers of suicide notes do not usually share a set of common texts or established conventions. In addition, a discourse community of suicide notes writers, who completed the suicidal act, if it existed, would lack experts for obvious reasons. However, as the rhetorical move/step analysis conducted in this study has demonstrated, suicide notes writers do share communicative goals. These issues serve as the rationale for viewing suicide notes as a private and "hidden" (Shapero, 2011; Swales, 1996) genre. Unlike other "open" academic (Swales & Feak, 2000) and professional genres (Bhatia, 1993), the suicide note represents a one-time communication. The note-writers commit suicide after writing the note

which prevents other forms of communication to take place in response. For these reasons, a “visible” discourse community according to the criteria suggested by Swales (1990) cannot be identified. However, an alternative view of a community can be adopted. Miller (1994b) introduced the theoretical construct of a “rhetorical community” (p. 62) which is “a virtual entity, a discursive projection, a rhetorical construct. It is the community as invoked, represented, presupposed, or developed in rhetorical discourse” (p. 62). Miller asserted that a rhetorical community is not unified and homogeneous compared to the Swalesian discourse community (1990). The rhetorical community “works in part through genre” (p. 62). If we look again at what Miller proposed, the writers of suicide notes might constitute a rhetorical community in which suicide notes are the way its members “operate rhetorically” (p. 62). Thus, a rhetorical community of suicide notes exists through instantiation and engagement and not through membership (Swales, 1993).

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter was dedicated to discussing the nature of the suicide notes genre according to the ESP genre approach. It presented a proposed rhetorical move/step structure of suicide notes based on the move analysis conducted in this thesis. It also demonstrated how suicide notes constitute a genre in the ESP genre approach by discussing the communicative purpose(s) of suicide notes and the concept of discourse community. Overall, it provided responses to the research questions raised at the beginning of this thesis.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the rhetorical move/step analysis of suicide notes. It also discusses the limitations of the present study and offers some implications of the study for genre theory and forensic linguistics and suggests some directions for future research.

#### Summary of the Findings

The purpose of the study reported in this thesis was to investigate if suicide notes constitute a genre by examining the communicative purpose and the rhetorical structure (Swales, 1990) of these texts. The ESP genre analysis revealed that suicide notes do share a rhetorical move/step structure, and accordingly, shared communicative purposes. The study also demonstrated that suicide notes constitute an “occluded” (Swales, 1996) genre, where an apparent discourse community (Samraj & Gawron, 2015) is not defined, but a rhetorical community (Miller, 1994b) is visible.

Five *quasi-obligatory* moves and 16 steps were found to occur across the corpus of suicide notes (n=86) with high percentage (between 47.6% and 86%). The five moves are *addressing a recipient*, *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer’s death*, *justifying suicide*, *expressing love*, and *signing off*, with the *expressing love* move considered *optional* because of its lower percentage of occurrence (47.6%) in the corpora. The steps used in some moves did not occur exclusively, meaning that a move might be realized by using more than one step (cf. Swales, 1990).

The *addressing a recipient* and the *signing off* moves frequently occurred as a first and a final move in the notes, respectively. The other moves had flexible order within suicide notes and not all the notes used all the moves identified in this analysis. Other structural moves were

identified in the analysis. However, these moves were not as frequent as the *quasi-obligatory* moves (Joseph et al., 2014) and were only found to occur in less than half of the texts.

After the move analysis had been conducted, the prominence of some lexico-grammatical features became clear in some of the moves. Specifically, in the *giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death* move, imperative verbs were commonly used to realize the move. The use of the imperative verb form reflected the communicative purpose of this move, that is, providing instructions to others. Other lexico-grammatical features that stood out in the *justifying suicide* move were the self-reference pronouns and pronouns that referred to others. The note authors used self-reference pronouns (e.g., *I*) to accept the responsibility of the suicide decision and pronouns that referred to others (e.g., *you*) to assign blame to others.

Based on the rhetorical move/step analysis, the main communicative purpose of suicide notes was identified: it is to convince the reader(s) that the act of suicide is justifiable. The communicative purpose is achieved through providing reasons to justify suicide. While the main communicative purpose is shared by all the notes in the corpus, some suicide notes have multiple purposes (Askehave, 1999; Askehave & Swales, 2001), such as asking for forgiveness and providing instructions for survivors.

In addition, shared communicative purposes and common rhetorical structure move/step structure suggest that suicide notes do constitute a genre. The genre of suicide notes is *hidden* from the public (Shapero, 2011) because writers do not usually have access to examples of suicide notes before writing one, that is, suicide notes constitute an “occluded” genre (Swales, 1996).

As this study shows, the genre of letters shares several generic moves with the genre of suicide notes: letters include an opening move that indicates a recipient(s) and a closing move

whose functions is to end the letter (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Sadeghi & Samuel, 2013; Upton, 2002; Upton & Cohen, 2009; Yunxia, 2000), which have been identified in suicide notes as the *addressing a recipient* move and the *signing off* move. However, the communicative purpose(s) of suicide notes is/are distinct from that of the genre of letters. Therefore, the study has established that suicide notes constitute a distinct genre (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999). The study also suggests that the writers of suicide notes constitute a rhetorical community (Miller, 1994b) viewed as a “virtual” community that exists through genre rather than through membership (Swales, 1993) as in the Swalesian discourse community (1990).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study is subject to at least three limitations. The first limitation relates to the sample of suicide notes. The corpora investigated in this study belong to the time periods of 1945-1954 and 1983-1984. Also, the sample size is limited to n=86. Despite the new findings provided in this study, the results cannot be generalized due to a limited size of the sample of suicide notes. The limited size of the corpus requires further research on a larger, preferably, contemporary corpus of suicide notes.

The second limitation relates to the ratio of suicide notes written by males to those written by females in the corpus. The majority of suicide notes included in this study were written by males (n=66) and only 20 suicide notes were written by females. As previously mentioned, gender affects the language used in suicide notes (e.g., Cannetto & Lester, 2002; Delgado, 2013); thus, it is important to include a more representative corpus of suicide notes written by females which might lead to broader generalizations of the rhetorical structure that captures suicide notes written by both genders.

A third, and a very significant, limitation is that the analysis only involved the texts of suicide notes without their context. The context for future investigations of suicide notes can be provided by the coroners' records or interviews with family members of the decedent. The context would provide further insights into the genre in question as suggested by Bhatia (1993, 2004) and Giles (2007).

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings of this study contribute to the current literature on genre theory and suicide notes research. First, the present study adds to a growing body of literature and knowledge of the ESP genre approach. By applying rhetorical move analysis to non-academic texts, the study developed a model of the rhetorical structure of suicide notes in a way similar to the CARS model developed by Swales (1990). The study also identified the communicative purposes that this genre serve and defined the "virtual" rhetorical community that the writers of suicide notes form. Second, the study extends our knowledge of the organization and language used in suicide notes by describing the macro and micro structure of these texts.

Third, and most importantly, the findings of this study can be utilized by forensic linguists, who deal with various texts and need to verify their authenticity (Chaski, 2001; Cotterill, 2010; Olsson, 2004). The move analysis combined with other methods of analysis and complemented with contextual information available, such as interviews or suicide files, can provide insights for forensic linguists and help determine if a suicide note is real, that is, written by the individual who committed suicide, or faked by another individual (Chaski, 2001). The move analysis may be used to examine the macro-structure of a suicide note, that is, the organization of the text, to aid in identifying the original author.

### **Directions for Future Research**

By considering the limitations of this research study, future studies can focus on a larger and more recent corpus of suicide notes to draw more generalizable conclusions concerning the rhetorical structure of suicide notes. Furthermore, having a more contemporary and balanced corpus of suicide notes written by males and females may provide new insights into the rhetorical structure of suicide notes. A study of such a corpus might explore differences in the rhetorical structure which may be affected by the gender of the note writer or by the time the note is written. As well, move analysis might be conducted on a corpus of fake suicide notes to devise a rhetorical structure of these texts which can be compared to the rhetorical structure of genuine suicide notes.

Future research may include cross-cultural comparisons of rhetorical move structure of suicide notes. In this study, a rhetorical structure of suicide notes written in one geographical location has been identified. Hence, further investigations are necessary to confirm and expand the current findings using corpora of suicide notes obtained from different locations.

Further research may include complete suicide files, which consist of suicide notes, coroners' records and other legal information (Giles, 2007; Olson, 2005). Investigating all these sources would place suicide notes in a context and result in what Geertz refers to as "thick description" (as cited in Bhatia, 1993, p. 5) of macro and micro structure of suicide notes.

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## Appendix A

### Shneidman and Farberow (1957) Genuine Suicide Notes (S&F)

(1)

To the Police. No note – one was written before this. Los Angeles Police already have a record of one attempt. Notify – Anne M. Jones, 100 Main St., Los Angeles, tel. BA 00000. I live at 100 Spring St., Los Angeles. I work at Ford, 100 Broadway. That is all.  
I can't find my place in life.

J. William Smith

(2)

I hope this is what you wanted.

(3)

Dearest Mary. This is to say goodbye. I have not told you because I did not want you to worry, But I have been feeling bad for 2 years, with my heart. I knew that if I went to a doctor I would lose my job. I think this is best for all concerned. I am in the car in the garage. Call the police but please don't come out there. I love you very much darling. Goodbye,

Bill

(4)

This is the last note I shall ever wright. No one should feel bad about my going as I am not worth it. I don't want to go but there is nothing else to do.  
My Love kept after me until I lost control and struck the only one I ever loved. The only thing that meant anything to me. Then I got tight. When I struck at her something snapped inside my head. I could feel it. I didn't want to hurt her ever. She is Mary Jones of 100 Main St. Los Angeles. Her aunt's phone is BA 00000. She lives close by. Please get in touch with them at once. She keped after me until this is all I can do. I must.  
My last request is not to be put 6ft. under but burned and my ashes scattered over the mountains. Please don't let my brother know how or why I died. To her it must be an accident. Mary is the most wonderful person on earth. I just wasn't the right one for her. It is not her fault I fell so madly in Love with her.  
I have never been much good. I have only hurt everyone.  
Well at least I have loved. I loved her and her two girls more than words could ever tell. They were like my own girls to me.  
Well, that's it.

John W. Smith

Get in touch with Mary Jones at once. Call BA 00000. Tell Mrs. Brown. She will see Mary.  
Thank you.

John William Smith

(5)

Honey I got you in this thing and it was no fault of yours – so I am taking the only way out and I leave everything which has all been acquired since we were married to you my darling wife – Mary Smith – and God Bless You Darling. Forgive me – goodbye dear. You trusted me and I thought I was doing everything for the best but I used poor judgment and poor management on

my part and bit off more than I could chew but didn't know it at the time I did it. Sell everything before winter sets in – I leave everything of value of any kind or nature including real estate – home – and all to you my darling wife. Tell my mother – sister I said God bless them all and forgive me – Goodbye darling and God bless you all.

Your loving husband always, William J. Smith

(6)

Dear Mary, The reason for my despondency is that you'd prefer the company of almost anyone to mine. 2. You told me you had nothing to look forward to on week ends. You told me you preferred living alone. This led to more sedatives. I have lost the love of my two children. You blamed me for your vaginal bleeding. Your first husband was denied normal sexual intercourse because you said it hurt. I received the same accuse. You said it hurt even out of wedlock. This you cant help. But affection would have been harmless. I had little of that. But gaiety you saved for strangers, but even so I loved you. My salary wasn't enough for a large family, with the car upkeep. I was happy regardless. So were you between moods also. You are free now to frequent the places where they drink and indulge in loose talk. Please refrain from giving Betty sips of beer, after all she is only 12. Make her love you some other way. Soon she'll dominate you and one thing leads to another. You don't want another child where your boy is. You love for me would have endured if it had been the real thing.

Dr. Jones did all he could for my internal trouble. When we quarrel over other and younger men it was silly but you would have been hurt too. It's O.K. to be friendly but not hilarious.

Nembutal has a tendency to make you tolerant rather than jealous. It headed off many a quarrel because its quieting to the nerves. As you know I took them for sleep and spastic colon at nite; also migraine headache.

Well, I've loved you through 3 years of quarreling, adjusting the sex angle the way you said it pleased you. Your word for it was "ecstasy." Farewell and good fortune. I hope you find someone who doesn't "hurt" you as you said 3 of us did. All the love I have,

Bill

Notify my kin by mail. Call Georgia St. Hosp. Ambulance.

(7)

My Dearest Wife: I cannot endure this situation any longer. I cannot believe I have been so bad a husband as to merit this. Something is certainly wrong. I honestly don't know what it is.

Whatever you may be searching for I hope with all my heart you find. Please be good to little Betty, our daughter, I love her so.

I am talking over this Cyanide to deal to myself. God knows what I'll do. I have it here.

Possibly 20 grams – 5 more than is necessary. I still love you. Be good to Betty Please.

(8)

Dear Mary. You have been the best wife a man could want and I still love you after fifteen years.

Don't think badly of me for taking this way out but I can't take much more pain and sickness also I may get to much pain or so weak that I can't go this easy way. With all my love forever –

Bill

(9)

Dear Mother. I just cannot take it any more this is no way out but this has me down. I Joseph William Smith give ever thing to Henry Jones my car and what ever I have.

Joseph Smith

(10)

Dear Mother and Mary, I am sorry to tell you this but Jo told you that I was drinking again. I won't lie about it. Because I quit for 5 week and never taken a drink. But Jo had come up home two nite a week after she got off from work and she would stay with me. But ever nite she came up she was drunk, and I would put her to bed. And on the nite of 12 of March she came drunk and when I went to work I left her in my bed and when she got up that was Wed. She went home she told me. But she didn't go home she went and got drunk, and I had been give her money to pay her room, and I give her money before I went that morning. But she go to the tavern and she got drunk and got in a fight. I don't know who with, but it was on the street and she eather fell or got nook down and she got a black and blue place on her hip big as a teacup. I asked her how she got that but she said she got it on the ice box and she said it was like that and I no difference. The one that told me didn't no Jo was my wife. He seen it and told her she could do better then that. He said she was to drunk. I saw this and this made me mad and I did start drinking because she told me that she love me and I was so nice to give her money. I do love her and she love me. But I cant stand for her to drink like she does and do like she do. Jo was up at my house Sun March 31, and she went home about 4 o'clock to go to work and I tryed to get to strating up. But she won't. If you can do anything with her I wish you would. Because I love her so much and she is killing herself. I wouldn't wrote you this if she hadn't told you I started to drink again. I told her Sun. I would help her and I will if she will be half way write with me.

(11)

Dearest darling I want you to know that you are the only one in my life and I love you so much I could not do without you please forgive me I drove myself sick honey please beleave me I love you again an the baby honey don't be mean with me please I have lived fifty years since I met you, I love you – I love you. Dearest darling I love you I love you. Please don't discraminat me darling I know that I will die don't be mean with me please I love you more than you will ever know darling please an honey Tom I know don't tell Tom why his dady said good by honey. Can't stand it any more. Darling I love you. Darling I love you.

(12)

To Mary Jones. Please take care of my bills. Tell Tom I made enough money for him. He can take care of my small bills. Mary, I love Betty and I can't stand being without her. She's something I spoiled myself.

Love, Bill

Mary take this pen as Helen gave it to me when I went to the army.

(13)

Dear Mary. Im sorry for all the trouble Ive caused you. I guess I can't say any more. I love you forever and give Tom my love. I guess I've disgraced myself and John I hope it doesn't reflect on you.

(14)

Mary Darling. It's all my fault. I've thought this over a million times and this seems to be the only way I can settle all the trouble I have caused you and others. This is only a sample of how sorry I am. This should cancel all.

Bill

(15)

I'm tired. There must be something fine for you. Love.

Bill

(16)

To Tom, Betty, John – The stigma I bring upon you cannot be much more than has already been done. Be good to your mother and do all you can to help as she is a wonderful person. Tom – a rather gruesome thought – Remember when we worked in the yard and you asked to see a cadaver at the College? Little did we know that I would be the first deceased for you to encounter. I love you and know you will make a wonderful man. Betty – We have been very close to each other. Please don't think too harshly of my actions. Stabilization takes place in time, and I know you will grow up to be one of the best women in the world. My love, dear. Johnny – You came last in our offspring so couldn't know me as well as your brother and sister. Just follow your brother's example, love your sister and help Mother. Remember, I love you, Johnny. Mary – There is no more or less to say than I have already told you – Truth will triumph eventually.

Bill

(17)

Dearest Mary – I just can't go on without Tom, John and you. I hope some day you can forgive me. I know you will find someone better for you and the boys. God bless you all.

Love, Bill

(18)

Dearest Mary: Well, dear – it's the end of the trail for me. It has been a fairly long and reasonably pleasant life, all in all – especially fine that part in which you played a part. You have been wonderful. No man could have asked for a better wife than you have been. Please understand that if I didn't feel that this course would be the best for you and the girls I certainly would have waited for nature to take her course. It would not have been long, anyhow, for the clot I coughed up was from the lungs and I know there's activity there – of an ominous nature.

Be good to your mother girls. You have the finest mother in the world; even as I have had the most wonderful wife and two wonderful daughters. Bye-by Mary, Betty, and Helen. How I do love you all. And may God help and guide you from here on in.

"Daddy"

(19)

Dear Mary. Since you are convinced that you are an invalid and no one can help you, I hope my \$3000 insurance will help you to see the truth about yourself and get rid of your mental sickness. You are now free to marry Joe. Remember you will never have any happiness with anyone until

you learn to help yourself. I have no regrets and hold no malice or unkind thoughts toward you. We would have had a happy life together if you had wanted to help yourself. I hope you eventually will find happiness. Love, Bill  
Tell my folks I'm sorry I couldn't see them before I went.

(20)

I specifically request that my body be disposed of by cremation. To my good friends, Joe Smith and Mary Jones I give my deep and undying affection. My dear parents, Henry W. and Betty C. Brown have done their best for me and it is my failure, rather than anything they have failed to offer that has brought this about. My sister, Helen White of 100 Main Street, New York, is closest and dearest to me and, with her consent, I ask that she take and raise my son. My phonograph records, now in storage with my parents, I give to my former wife, Wilma Brown, 200 Broadway, Los Angeles, Calif.

Explanations would be useless suffice to say I have tried and failed. Given unto my hand this ninth day of June in the year of 1943, A.D., in the city of Los Angeles, California.

Jack Brown

(21)

Some where in this pile is your answers. I couldn't find it. Mom, you should have known what was about to happen after I told you my troubles now I will get my rest.

Dad, I am in this jam because I trusted people (namely you) and some people trusted me, because I am, in my present state a menace to me and my customers think this is the best way out, and out of my insurance if you ever take a drink I hope you drown yourself with it.

(22)

My dearest family: I am terribly sick and it is all my fault. I blame no one but myself. I know it is going to go hard with Tommy and Sister. Please see that Tommy gets a Mickey Mouse Watch for his birthday. Helen I am counting on you to take care of Mother. Please do not follow in my fottsteps.

Mary my darling I know you did everything possible to avoid this, but please forgive me, as I think it was the only way out. God forgive me and help take care of my family.

(23)

Dear Mary. Honey I hope you will forgive me for being the way I was this AM. I honestly love you with all my heart and I thought we would understand things together. I didn't know you felt the way you did about everything. I really thought we were the "happily married couple." Too bad you just keep everything inside you.

For the first time in my life I was really in love, and I thought you were too. I had hopes that you would forget your feelings and we would try to be happy together.

My bonus should take care of things so you contact Joe. Sorry to end things this way now to you – I wish you the best of everything.

I did and do think you the nicest person ever. Good by and thanks for everything.

Bill

(24)

To my wife Mary: As you know, like we've talked over before our situation, I'll always love you with all my heart and soul. It could have been so simple if you had have give me the help that you alone knew I needed.

This is not an easy thing I'm about to do, but when a person makes a few mistakes and later tried to say in his own small way with a small vocabulary that he is sorry for what has happened and promises to remember what has happened and will try to make the old Bill come home again, and do his best to start all over again, and make things at home much better for all concerned, you still refuse to have me when you as well as I know that I can't do it by myself, then there's only one thing to do.

I'm sorry honey, but please believe me this is the only way out for me as long as you feel as you do – This will put you in good shape. Please always take care of Betty and tell her that her Daddy wasn't too bad a guy after all. With all the love that's in me. Bill

Yes, Mommie, now you have your car and a lot more too, even more than you had hoped for. At least you are better off financially than you were 6 years ago. The only pitiful thing about the whole situation is the baby and the nice car that I bought with blood money. I only hope I do a good job of it. Then your troubles will be over with. I know this is what you have been hoping for for a long time. I'm not crazy, I just love you too much!!!

I love you – Daddy – Goodbye forever.

(25)

Mary: The only thing you never called me was crazy. Now you can do that. I loved you so.

Bill

(26)

Dear Mary. Everything is kind of mixed up with me and what I am doing is the only way out I guess I can think of no other I am very sorry I got you in the shape we are in but I did love you very much. It is going to hurt my mother and Dad to and also you I think. I hope you all the luck in the world.

With all my love, Bill. Goodbye

(27)

Mary dear. Im sorry that I have been making you unhappy – I'm all twisted up inside. You and Joe will be better off this way – start over.

Love, Bill

(28)

Darling wife, Mary Helen Smith I'm sorry for everything I did please don't be angry at me my sweet wife. You left me and did not say anything. So darling this is your divorce my darling wife Mary. I wish you get the rings back my dear wife. Goodby my dear wife Mary. I love you more than anything in the hold world my sweet wife.

William Smith

(29)

Dear Mary; I'm just too tired and too sick of trying to continue. Sorry it had to be this way. I'm sure everything will work out for the best. Keep everything quiet as possible. Say I had a heart attack.

As Ever, Bill

God forgive me. God bless you and John.

(30)

Honey. I am sorry this is the only way I know. I am all wrong. I love you very much.

Bill

(31)

Dear Mary. I am writing to you, as our Divorce is not final, and will not be till next month, so the way things stand now you are still my wife, which makes you entitled to the things which belong to me, and I want you to have them. Don't let anyone take them from you as they are yours. Please see a lawyer and get them as soon as you can. I am listing some of the things, they are: A Blue Davenport and chair, a Magic Chef Stove, a large mattress, and Electrolux cleaner, a 9x12 Rug redish flower design and pad. All the things listed above are all most new. Then there is my 30-30 rifle, books, typewriter, tools, and hand contract for a house in Chicago, a Savings account in Boston, Mass.

Your husband, William H. Smith

(32)

Good bye my Dear. I am very sorry but it is just too hard to breathe.

Love, Bill

Dearest have someone at the Legion call the V.A. I think they will take care of me.

(33)

Good by Kid. You couldn't help it. Tell that brother of yours, When he gets where I'm going. I hope I'm a foreman down there. I might be able to do something for him.

Bill

## Appendix B

### Leenaars's (1988) Corpus of Suicide Notes Written by Males (LM)

(1)

Mary

I have signed all the pink slips for the cars so it will be easier for you to dispose of them I don't want to be here when all the Buzzards pick through of my stuff But if I were you I would Move Back Here And Keep an eye on things for I am sure there will be a lot of looting

MARY-

CALL ME AND LET ME KNOW IF THIS GOT TO YOU

The best advice I have for you is talk to John I think he is honest, maybe you could make some kind of deal to restore them for you say you could get the most money – don't

Please notify my wife Mary Smith

Phone BA 00000

c/o

BE CAREFUL

CYANIDE GAS IS

IN THIS BATHROOM

(2)

Mary, Jane, Joe John cant take it

lecturing will get worst now

forgive if you can

Dad

(3)

Dear Mary

After last night I know you do love me. You tried so hard to say you don't but your not speaking from your heart. Listen to it Baby remember in sickness and in health, richer or poorer till Death remember its going to Be our wedding date so very soon. I love you you stupid head. SMO I hope you Shno so Deeply. I've been wrong but I'm still you loving husband forever. I am not sick to do what I have to. Your not like Jane she was a pig your so very different and so special of a person I love you and miss you so very much. Don't drink Don't let another man touch you honey. Put your ring back in the right place. I cant see how to live with you rebelling from me this is me honey Bill. SMO come to me Baby let me take care of you. I long to hold you in my arms and make love to you forever remember! Please I'm your husband Baby.

I set up outside to look like home. My home is with you NO MATTER WERE. Lets go home honey let me love you. Don't rebell any more. Your realy the only one who knows me Bill.

Not any one else. I know you also. the cats are gone everything but I know you love me.

Stop it right now. Its me honey Bill stop this nightmare come to me your husband Its not wrong to love me not matter who said it is. I am here honey I'll be out back I have a change of clothes for you. You can take porsch Butt to the park again just our family. I know you love me honey I know I'm in your heart. I'll be waiting for you no matter where I go. I love you mush please rember all the love I have shown you. rember please for God sake rember.

Love

Bill

(4)

Mary,

Please take care of my affairs, this was all my fault of selling house and everything I brought on myself. I can't go on living like this. I hope God will forgive me for taking my own life. I know the church will was true if only we could of lived it better. Take care of yourself. I can't live without you:

Love Bill

(5)

I William Smith Do not want to Live anymore I am sick Mary I want to feel Better

William Smith

P.S. I want to DIE

(6)

Mary

First of all I'd like to say I really don't know how this is going to come out on paper. This is a first. These past few days I've had more than enough time on my hands to think. (only of us/you.) I want only one thing right now that is for us to pull this together God I don't know why in the hell it has taken me all these years to tell you I love you. You needed this all this time. My heart is puring out for you now. I can only hope its not to late.

I want your love the way it was when you gave me your all. I now its probably impossible. I'd give anything.

What I want to ask is there is chance that we can rebuild a healthy relationship. I want you to be able to say thats my old man. Be proud + supportive of me I want to be able to stand behind you with the same type of actions and feelings I need some time to open up the way you expect + deserve. I know now I need this counseling to open my mind and soul to make me a person worth giving your all to + myself being able to throw this damn sheild Ive been carrying around for so long. I gave everything I had to a relationship that wasn't worth the fucking powder to blow it to hell. I guess since that time Ive always been afraid to be vulnerable. I sat in solitary confinement for weeks crying my heart out. I swore to myself at that time there would never be another time. I've blown it to hell with you. I can only ask for your understanding and this guidance Im reaching out for now. I can state truthfully I should have looked for help earlier. I know I'll be able to express love to you if you will find it in your heart to let me. I want you and need you. I know you feel I've let you down. I readily admit its be a one way street.

I'm sitting just waiting for this phone to ring + pick up with your voice on the other end.

Everytime a car pulls up I pray that its you. Maybe it will be before the end of tonight Im reaching out please tell me its not to late. I love you. I'll you as often as you want to hear it if you'll let me in. love you

Bill

We have got to pull together

(7)

I sit alone. Now, at last, freedom from the mental and physical torment I have been experiencing. I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't. What a choice.

This should come as no surprise. My eyes have spoken for a long, long time of the distress I feel. The self-imposed isolation, the rejection, the failures and frustrations overwhelm me. The laughs are all gone and irrationality has control. There is no way to pull myself out of the hell where I've placed myself.

Please, please respect the dignity of respecting my wishes regarding no services, etc. It is all spelled out in the personal file of papers. If the XYZ program does not work out, use the alternate plan.

I truly wish this could all have ended in a different way, but that was just not to be.

Goodbye, love, forgive me. May you all find happiness.

Bill

1. The personal file is up to date. All important documents (stocks, etc.) are in the safe-deposit at (bank). The deposit box key is on the car key chain. The box at (bank) just holds some copies of items which are not vital.
2. Don't forget there will be an extra \$2000 in the (credit union) as life insurance
3. My IRA and account funds are available to you as cash as beneficiary. Both at (bank).
4. The Travel file is on the file cabinet in the bedroom. Contact Joe for an appointment and perhaps he can offer some new way to collect for the estate. At least he can review what has occurred and tell you what property of John's is attached.
5. A good attorney can probably effect some kind settlement on the medical situation and explain the legal obligations for whatever is unpaid.

(8)

honey I don't know how to say this When you read this Don't feel Bad or Sad about me – Im my own way I am trying to straiten things out I got us in such a mess it's my own fault – you should have some pension and Insurance from the local – change the lot on (street) to your name only spend the money will take care of yourself Just help the Boys if you can

Bury or Burn me as cheap as possible I don't care where. You should find a lot and let the Boys build you a little house and get the rest of the Insurance money. You only need one car now sell the truck it will help get things squared away Tell Bill I have no hard feelings to him I think he knows that. You don't have to call my whole family I don't think its that Important. I wish I could turn Back time But I cannot do that.

I know I had a job But the way my mind is I don't think I could handle it – like you said honey I give to everybody But you and I feel like I am a leech You have worked hard for years and you deserve something Better than me I hope you forget me real soon.

Love Bill

PS Boys I Love You

I called Joe I wanted to here his voice one more time I told him that the fight was not your fault.

(9)

I have taken my life because I tried shock treatment at the (hospital) and I became unbearably worse! I have no further desire to live. I am very bitter about what the shock treatments did to me. They made me worse than I've ever been in my whole life.

(10)

I tried to get this car to san Francisco where I was happy to die. The carburetor wont co-operate I can't live in VA Hosp. And I wont live without you.

I'm sorry I hurt you and scared you Christmas. It scared me to death but nobody cared.  
 If I don't kill myself I'll kill her and I love her to much  
 I love you  
 They wont even admit it was there because what I did  
 Let the VA bury me  
 I don't care what happens to this body  
 To whom it MAY CONCERN UPON MY DEATH I RELISE ALL INTEREST IN THIS  
 VEHICLE.  
 1980 BMW  
 Lic. 000000  
 AND WILL IT TO \_\_\_\_ FOR DEBTS OWED TO HER

Dear Mary

I'm sorry sweetheart I know everything thats happened to us was my fault.  
 I wish I could have been your white knight I just couldn't take pressure.  
 You gave me the only happiness I've ever known  
 I gave you all the love and will live to live that I had left  
 Please remember the good times  
 I wish you could have had our kid. I would have been good to them  
 I always loved you there was never anyone else

(11)

I cannot continue any longer. The pain has become too unbearable. Jane is not responsible. My  
 problems are insoluble. I should have done it thirty five years ago  
 Bill

(12)

Lay in bed detsying all day  
 Life?? is so boreing. Back into the same old rut. No lights in Chev. Joe has got car. Truck  
 wont start, stereo quit, caint sleep.  
 Women left me. I feel like shit.

(13)

Mary

Youve always told me not to play phone games.  
 I passed you on the street today we seen each other but you kept going like you didn't even know  
 who I was.  
 I called your house but you unplugged your phone  
 You would never answer my calls at your work.  
 You could at least call me  
 I think you are seeing someone else if you are I think you should tell me. We are both grown up  
 enough to understand  
 I love you very much and I know you loved me at onetime but like you said I will drive you to  
 someone else. Well I see that what happened.  
 You must like him because your never home and when you are you won't even call me. You  
 unplug the phone

I know I fucked up your life, like they say misery loves company well I guess thats me misery. I hope we can work it out, But if you feel happier with someone else there is nothing I can do But regret every bad thing I ve did + said to you.

MOM PLEASE SELL THE BIKE AND PAY JANE \$2000 I OWE HER MORE BUT THAT ALL I GOT

Bill

(14)

Evaluation + Options present situation

Received Last Check           220.00

Cash on hand approx.         50.00

Rent O'due 13 days

225.00

Food for 1 wk. (Less milk)

Options

- 1     Effort for job by 19th (and pit off rent?) until 30th + 7th Oct  
This option with owner of Bldg. (If not, go to option 5)
- 2     Same as above Less Rent, move 1st Where?
- 3     Wait for evaluation, live on street, etc.?
- 4     Beg from friends?
- 5     Buy a Steak, Dope, Booze and go out with a BANG!  
(And see a couple of ladies first!!!)  
Discussion closed!\_\_\_\_\_

(15)

Do you remember a Halloween Party 24 years ago? You were so warm that night and now are filled with ice and frigid dislike of me. How appropriate. Halloween, the start and end of our lives. And at the start, the vows that were made; for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or worse. And now death do us part.

In a month, Thanksgiving. I was away just after our first one. Bet you can't remember what I gave you on our first Christmas? Oh, what's the use of reminiscing? I'm gone and you have cold and hard thoughts of me. I just know I can't live in rented room after all these years. The final failure.

(16)

Joe

Everything I can think of is in the best possible order. I am truly sorry to leave without notice. I did my best to leave everything set up. I have expressed my personal feelings in the past and they still stand. I always tried to do my best for you and you reciprocated.

Me sincere thanks for all the help and education, as well as the personal assistance.

There could be a lot more said but I don't think it is necessary.

The only things I removed from my office were personal.

In my car is my briefcase with company info etc. including various company keys.

If you can help Mary + she wants it, please try.

My most personal best

to You + Yours,  
Bill

Mary

You know so many ways to say "I love you"...with a kiss, a touch, just everything you do...But I don't know any way to really thank you, except to say how much I love you, too.

Happy Anniversary

We almost made 15 years honey.

Thanks for all the good times and happiness.

Love,  
Bill

(17)

I can't handle the responsibility of life.

I have tried to cope with the pressures but find that I just can't do it.

I'm sorry to leave behind those people I love – Mary, Jane, Joe, John, my mother, sisters, niece and nephews – I hope they find peace and happiness in this difficult life.

I've tried to make it and failed – just can't get it together anymore!

This terrible depression keeps coming over me and I can't bear feeling so bad. Thanks to the people who tried to help me but I became beyond help!

Bill Smith

(18)

Please call my children first

Can't Take much more Love you all to much  
gone to see Mary

I can't live without Mary this pain + misery is to much

Love all you kids forgive me ain't going to Die in Hosp. Like Mom

Love Dad

(19)

Well he couldn't Hack It, (OH Well)

If your interested you are welcome to what ever you want in the garage. Ask Joe for the key I've let him know that you may ask for it. Anything you don't want that is valuable I would appreciate it broken, burned or buried. Perhaps you may take some things to Miss Jane. OH Yeah She has a fine place. The key to the chest on the small Round table against the Southe wall of the garage next to chest. If you don't want the skulls please crush them. There is an excellent supply of incense some very choice vintage.

You may also have the musical instruments that I once had. Do with them as you wish.

Yes, Yes, any books you want you may have.

See Ya Around  
Bill

(20)

(top of note missing)

...with Jesus + that I have prayed for him to lookafter you and Jane. I have prayed that you aren't destroyed by this because that would be something I could never be forgiven for. My love for

you has always been the deepest and hopefully I'll see you again. You are my miracle. I have accepted the lord Jesus as my saviour but I know that he wouldn't condone this. I accept the just dues, and pray that maybe you wont hurt anyone. Make our kid something! for your strength and love does work miracles. You and Jesus I pray can forgive me for copping out. Its me who accepts the responsibility of my actions. I apolagize to all of you + beg Jesus forgiveness. I love all our friends + loved ones. Pray for me for I know if there is a heaven, I'll hopefully meet you there someday. You have been and will always be the brightest ray of sunshine that eve entered my life and no one can take that away. If I see mom I'll see that Joe is taken care of + will try to be with him too! I Love thos kids and am asking yours + Jesus forgiveness for the trauma I have caused them. Eternity is the best way of saying how long I love you. Dad I hope will find the strength in

May the lord bless + keep you + forgive me for something I have no earthly rights to do.

Your loving husband  
Your loving father  
Your loving Son  
Bill

(21)

Joe You to are a good kid. If you had given me more of a chance I would have done anything for you. But I love you just the same. Your mother and I had our difference but I still love her very much so please take good care of her for me please.

P.S. Joe The bike is still yours. But please be carefull with it. Drive it with the utmost safety please

Good bye Joe remember I love you

Your Father  
Bill

To: My wife Mary

Mary all I can say is Im sorry for the why things turned out. I guess you where right we could not make it with our marriage.

I do wish I could undo the thing I had done but I can't. But do know I could have made it up to you in other ways. So this is it I just cant cope anymore say good bye to your mother and Jane + John and give all my love to Joe he was my pride + joy. I love him very much so give him a special good bye from Pap-pa. Mary Im sorry and I love you please nver forget that I love you.

Good bye your husband  
Bill

(22)

But, if there's a force & I'm given to control any of it, it shall be with you-

Just don't know why Joe didn't call me for so damn long – always punishing me for something.

You literally own her oil have for over two yrs. R & E Me? Bye all becoming very hard to cogi-type-tate-should've planned ahead more –

John, thanks for tol'rat'n the abuses

Xev –Needn't tell you...You were? There was sorry too for things said but I was just trying to see you the baddest way tickets I could

All love to & warm heart to

(23)

Mary

Everything we have should go for the kids I left another \$230.00 on the bottom of the steps Just have the state bury me. Its cheaper After all we are not legally married. They can not make you pay for anything.

Good Bye

I Love You

Bill

The grass is greener on the outhur side

(24)

Mary

I Love You.

I know you can't cope with Me. Please don't think I did this because of you. I'm fucked. But I do love you very much. I just can't cope. Please try to be good + remember all the good times.

Good Times

I was happy

Bill

The car is Mary's

Bill Smith

Please sent vamp. to (name, ph. #)

I gave Jane my stereo.

Don't let Sue have anything.

Put me to sea please

I love you Mary

See you later!!!

(25)

I just checked out may God have mercy on my soul

(26)

Dear Joe –

I'm sorry it seems to be the only way.

Love –

Bill

(27)

Jane give all of my possessions to Mary and don't want Sue to attend my funeral.

Bill

Mary Please take this check and withdraw all the money from my account

Thank you

Bill

Please pay Joe at (business) \$1400.00 (tel. #)

Bill

The BMW License/ ABCXYZ should be retrieved from (auto shop) across the street and given to Jean when she turns 21 and is not to be sold

My share of the houses should go to Jean and she is to retain full possession until such time that she remarries and at such time of this house that belongs to me should go to alcoholics

Anonamous

(28)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I love you both and I want to thank you for everything that you did from bringing me up to helping me with this current problem. As you know I have been a saver all my life and have spent almost nothing on myself all these years. I have been a prisoner of this discipline all my life; you taught me well. I can not face the future for what these people might want to do to me. So I am putting an end to my life.

I will everything I have to both of you. I have accounts with Bank of \_\_\_ in \_\_\_, \_\_\_ Bank in \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ Savings and Loan of \_\_\_ whose office is in \_\_\_. As well as \_\_\_ AAA account: I hve a \$50,000, CD with B of A and a \$35,000 with \_\_\_ Bank. My safety deposit box is with B of A. The note that is in the Box from Mr. \_\_\_ has not been paid back to me yet and he will owe you the money now according to the terms of the note. He still works at \_\_\_ and his home phone is \_\_\_\_\_. His work number is \_\_\_\_\_.

I do not fit in this current society and I hope that whatever happens to my spirit, if there is such a thing, it will be happier there.

I hope you understand why I have done this – I just don't fit in to this world.

Please use the money to have fun, we both know there is no need to invest it.

I want Mary to share in this also. She has been wonderful to me and I feel that I should help her financially. You be the judge as to how to do this distribution.

My radio equipment should be given to my wonderful friends Jane and Joe. They are both friends inead.

I hope that I can find happiness out there somewhere.

With all the love in me.

Bill

(29)

I am tired of failing

If you can do this I will succeed

(Phone #) Police

(ext. #) Sgt. \_\_\_\_\_

Bear

my love

I can't help myself + I can't do any more damage than I already have.

1. First call Mary
2. Don't forget that you can call on friends like Mike for support + to take care of Maitai
3. Sign my unemployment check + deposit it – (mail box toy is right here)
4. Car needs gas
5. You will live a happy healthy life
6. I am sorry
7. Forever + a day is red

Love

Bill

XXXXXXXXXX

When you read this I will be dead (\_\_\_\_) take care of you get my other letters from the file

(30)

Post man – call Sherrif  
Shooting in back yard.  
no news papers

(31)

Mom!  
Please forgive me. I'm too ill.  
Please take care of Mary and the children.  
Mary was really good to me – a great wife.

Love \_\_\_\_  
Bill

Dearest Mary, I beg you forgiveness for what I have done to myself, to you, the children and all the family. I am sick – too sick to continue on this painful path.

After all the pain and suffering subsides, write to the insurance companies and the Veterans Administration, so that you can obtain the insurance benefits to live on for a time.

What else can I say in this painful letter. Please remember all the beautiful times that we shared together. I thank you for all of it.

You have two beautiful children as a remembrance of these god times and our good marriage.

I am truly sorry, the end came like this. I hope you can carry on, alone for a time.

May God help you

Bill

I see no way that I can recover from the illness that I have. It is now worse than ever.

Thank you for all the good times. You are a great wife

Love  
Bill

(32)

Forgive me For today I die I just can't live without Mary. I might as well be dead may be their will be piece. I have this empty feeling inside me that is killing me everyday I just can't take it any more. When Mary left me I died inside I cry to God to help me but he doesn't listen.

whom it may concern:

Please notify the following people what has happened to me

My son + daughter: (names, address)

My father – (name, address)

My mother – (name, address)

My sister

I will everythin I own to my son John and my daughter Jane – divided 50-50.

I have \$4000 in my money market account no. \_\_\_\_ at the (bank) at the (city) office # \_\_\_\_

I have \$747.92 in my checking account no. \_\_\_\_ at the (bank) at the (city) office # \_\_\_\_

There is \$649 i my wallet – in cash.

My car is the blue Ford in the parking lot out back. License No ABCXYZ

I also leave them the two endorse checks – one for \$20.00 + the other for \$65.30.

Sincerely  
Bill Smith

(33)

Suicide (?) Note.

I hope this works

There is an envelope at my feet for Dr. X in the Psychology Dept. Please see to it that he gets it.

Also, class rosters for Trade-Tech are in my brown bag.

Farewell, farewell, what a ridiculous way to pretend to go.

Maybe this will go off by mistake.

I hope! (Am terrified)

What a rotten sham to pull. It's too bad I don't have enough personality to be ashamed of myself.

I should shoot my cat first.

Fleas everywhere.

You just can't continue leaning on everyone like this. This is a petty criminal mentality. It's sick! & you don't want to get better, you want to get worse. Those who have befriended you (or loaned you money) get it the worst.

## Appendix C

### Leenaars's (1988) Corpus of Suicide Notes Written by Females (LF)

(1)

I wish I could explain it so someone could understand it. I'm afraid it's something I can't put into words.

There's just this heavy, overwhelming despair – dreading everything. Dreading life. Empty inside, to the point of numbness. It's like there's something already dead inside. My whole being has been pulling back into that void for months.

Everyone has been so good to me – has tried so hard. I truly wish that I could be different, for the sake of my family. Hurting my family is the worst of it, and that guilt has been wrestling with the part of me that wanted only to disappear.

But there's some core-level spark of life that just isn't there. Despite what's been said about my having “gotten better” lately – the voice in my head that's driving me crazy is louder than ever. It's way beyond being reached by anyone or anything, it seems. I can't bear it any more. I think there's something psychologically twisted-reversed that has taken over, that I can't fight any more. I wish that I could disappear without hurting anyone. I'm sorry.

(2)

Dear God

I love you so much I can not express the way I feel about you you have been so good to me + my Daughter in so many way.

God I thank you for all the thing you have bless me with my life + home clothes everything I love you so much, God you know, but what even it is Iran putting it in you hard I can not deal with need more

- 1 Let your will be.
- 2 bless me with a job.

(3)

Dear Dad & Mom

I Love You Very Much. I am Sorry for any problems that may have resulted from the way I treated my family. I wanted to know you But I just wasn't there. I wanted to be Strong for you & I went the wrong way. Father thank you for being my friend It would have been much easier to have just been a father but you wanted to be my friend & I have just wasn't their (Thank you for that & everything you've done for me)

Mother; I Love you so much you were always their when I needed you. you are very strong please forget aboutme I know it hurts but I was wrong. I Love you both so very much.

Your Son Bill

(4)

Mom,

Thanks for waiting up for me. Thanks for not inviting me. Please do not give [dog] to anyone.  
you can have my furniture but nothing absolutely nothing is to Bill.

Thanks for the Memories

Mary

(5)

Dear Jane,

I found a relative (a nice one) up North to stay with. I've left the keys, etc. where you can find them. I'll be back for the rest of my stuff as soon as I can.

Take Care of Yourself

Mary

MOVING TO SAN FRANCISCO BECAUSE OF X Mary

PLACE TO LIVE

MARY'S PEOPLE

Find 2 Jobs in San Francisco

JOB

EMOTIONS

Deal With Them

Learn From Mistakes

Commit Suicide

Hospital

PROBLEMS

EMOTIONS

BETTING OVER LOSING Betty

Mary

DON'T

COME

IN

---

 CALL

THE

POLICE

I HAVE COMMITTED

SUICIDE

(6)

Hello Jane

I just wanted to tell you i still love you very much Babe I'll always love you very much.

My God i don't know how all this happen but it did. I wish it never did happen. All i know it hurts real bad just thinking of it makes me cry and say why. I never thought you would do this to me.

Byi my Lady I love you forever,

Mary

P.S. talk

Byi

You're always be part of me and thought  
 Jane I just want you to know I love you very much You know I still love you sweetie, I don't  
 understand how all this happened, but you know what, I wish this would never have happened.  
 Jane It hurts me very much. Just thinking of what happened makes me wonder why. I never  
 thought you would do this to me! BABE I miss you.

respectfully  
 Mary

P.S. I love you BABY

(7)

I commit suicide because I want to be with my father forever- Don't rescue me otherwise I will  
 die by harder way and harm others.

Mary

(8)

Mother-

I know the words I am about to write will never answer why or ease any sorrow you may feel.  
 These last 13 months of my life have been the most painful of my 30 years. I've been thru so  
 much that along the way I lost myself. This is the way I want it; if that will help.

Unfortunately I must once more be faced with what to do about loose ends.

Most importantly Mom I want you to understand I must be cremated, not buried, and I do not  
 want any kind of service! Death should be just that. No mourning or sadness. If you like, on  
 my 1 year of being gone have a mass for my soul to be found.

Disability will be sending me a white slip to mail on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Do that and use the money on  
 whatever you can. You know I have no money to leave anyone.

I don't want those assholes Jane & Joe to get my car. You'll have to tell them I had severe  
 breakdown and can only afford to pay \$50.00, as I have been, because I'm away in a hospital.

Enclosed are my keys. The smallest one is for my storage. Mom I want you to contact John for  
 me. I am leaving everything of mine to him because he loved me and was my very truest friend!  
 He is to take over my payments of \$50.00 on my car (without Jane & Joe knowing) when its paid  
 off he gets the pink slip. Everything personal & otherwise in my storage is his to do with what  
 he likes.

Tender words only make matters difficult. I would like to say I love you and thank you for your  
 love.

Mary

(9)

Honey, I know you will be upset so call Jane or Sue or Jean across street for children

Over

call police + cover me up

Don't let the kids in the bedroom. I'm dead

Mary

(10)

So many people –

have loved me + tried to help – Thank you – but I couldn't pull that together to let it be enough

-I have too much anger to face – I can't do it  
Will

All my possessions go to my mother-  
+ my sister

Selling my car should pay off outstanding debts to  
(X) Counseling Service  
Master Charge – (X) Bank  
Student Loan

All other possessions are paid for  
Mary Smith  
SS# \_\_\_\_\_

(11)

When you receive this I will be dead.

Please feed my pets – cats as soon as possible.

Put them to sleep at the Vets not the pet shelter. The vets will charge about \$10 each.

You will find enough money in the house to pay for it.

You may also have my 2 rings + my earrings.

The \$5000 trust you + Bill can decide about

Me

At peace at last

Mary

I did not move – my body will be at the \_\_\_\_\_ address

I AM

NOT MOVING

SORRY

(12)

Mary

(tel #)

Jane

(tel #)

If I haven't the Love I want so bad there is nothing left

(13)

8:30 A.M.

My Last Will and Testament

I leave any money or possessions left, if any, after debts are paid, to Joe, my brother, and Jane, my therapist, split 50-50.

I'm sorry that I couldn't put the important papers in order. I can't organize anything any more.

Tax receipts are in blue accordion folder on bookcase. John of (Bank) has my savings (ph. #)

I just can't go on like this anymore. The depression and loneliness are too much for me. Being off work will just make things worse. I tried to make it and failed.

Cremate me.

Love to all,  
except Sue & Tony  
Mary Smith

SS# \_\_\_\_\_

Thurs. A.M.

This is a Tx for competence and clear thinking.

P.M.

I talked to Jane this A.M. + she was very understanding, saying my work was good as anyone else's + just not to push myself so hard + not to panic when I can't remember something.

I went to the Depression clinic They have one study that would take me off drugs for one week on a placebo + then be on one of two drugs. She believes I'm getting worse on (drug) + that I need to get off of it + onto (drug) ASAP. I do

P.M.

I had another day of fear and trepidation. Praying not to be caught up in emergencies which I can't handle. By day's end, I felt that there is no way out.

Then, had my session with Jane. All she can do is nitpick about how I need to feel small + helpless – yes I do feel that way, but it doesn't help me to get back on my feet quickly. Damn her! She could be fixing me up better somehow, I'm sure. She doesn't know how it is – though I've tried my best to show her. I'm f.....g mad at her – All right. Maybe my expression of that anger is good for me. Maybe it'll help me – It has already helped – I'm sure of it. I feel angry + that's better than feeling empty. I'm "some better" as she says.

The Art of Listening

The Art of Listening

Be patient – listen to the whole question

Don't start thing @ your response

Listen to Nature/God

Listen

Behold I stand at the door and knock

The Art of Listening

Shut out the useless

The more we know of our being the better instruments

Bill

Separated from Supply

Recognize God

Reunify (?)

Realization

Thank

How Religious Science Works

How Religious Science Works

Go slowly. Listen carefully

Peace Corps

(ph #)

I slept 'til 10 + finally got up @ 10:30. I don't know what I'm going to do. The only two avenues open, if I continue so depressed, are 1 Kill myself 2 Quit the job + retreat to New York. Both seem hopelessly awful. I rode bicycle for 1 mile Monday

I feel just awful. What am I going to do? Called Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ San Francisco left message? Rode bike a little. Flaied on floor + worked up sweat.

The Situation is Hopeless but not Serious

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_



(18)

Dearest Jane

Wed.

I went to the little park (with all the eats) because I wanted to be by myself. If I'm not home when you get home would you please come + get me.

My brown purse is in top drawer!

Love Mary

Dearest Jane

I'm doing this against Bill, not you!

He said (over the phone in Holland) that he loved me, but I haven't seen him more than 10n times since I've returned.

The keys to all my metal boxes are in the pocket of mama's blue coat hanging in the closet nearest the bathroom (in the long beige plastic bag). The keys to all my trunks + suitcases are in the large metal box (with unbroken handle) on the floor of the closet. The jewelry is all real + I want only you to use it – no one else.

The negatives of all the pictures I took in Germany and Holland (for 10 years) are in the large metal box on the shelf; the prints themselves are in one of the soft sided bags on the shelf in closet.

Anything you might need is in the brown purse in the top drawer of the chest: hospital forms (Blue Cross) (I have Medicare stamps with me). If you have any questions about the Blue Cross, call Equity in New York tel. (#). My social security number is (#).

Ask Bill if it would help his tax situation, if he sent a letter to New York to get my W2 from the year I worked there (I think it was X-X) Only address I can remember (address)

I want to be buried near mama + daddy, not one of the burials at sea, nor cremation.

Bill's tel # at "home" is (#)

His work number is Tel (#)

Love,  
Mary

Call Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, and be sure + return check + medicare when they arrive.

P.S. Every document you will need, is in "smallish" brown purse in upper drawer. I'm out target practising.

P.S. I bought a gun because I was very scared when I went to New York; also I can't find the copy of my birth certificate.

(19)

To wait 1 month for Death certificate is too much. I don't think I can make it.

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ is a very kind person

I went to apply for welfare – they put me on some kind of work house arrangement. and I have to run around all over the area for 10 Jobs. why am I being punished. it is a cruel and inhuman punishment. I'm too old for this. I don't have stamina anymore. for a younger person it would be O.K. So I won't qualify. I'm too old to live on the street. I'm a nonperson I've never been a compitant person

things like going to an office and filling out forms never work for me they always want something I don't have like Death certificate, marriage license etc. "What is your address" I don't have one. I cant even get mail Why is everything so hard for me. I give up.

My Husband was a manic Depressive in July he became very high in a manic state and uncontrollable I managed to get him Hospitalize many times but he wouldn't stay in Hospt. We live on small VA (#) Disability pension. Comes on 1<sup>st</sup> of month. I've got into our August check and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> all our money was gone. I've no idea what he did with it. So I decided to go to his father and try to borrow some money to see us through the month of August. I was unsuccessful. I learned that Bill was finally in Hosp a few days after I'd left.

While I was up north at Bills parents and Bill was in the hosp. the owner of our apt Bld. Broke into our apt. and cleaned it out of all our possessions our rent was pay up until the end of August. I wrote and told him that I wasn't coming Back right away + if at the end of the month Bill was still in the Hospital to call the good will and give our things to them. I stressed in this letter that our rent was paid up until the end of August. – But he didn't wait like I expected him to the very day he got my letter he instigated the removal of our possessions. Leaving nothing we were totally wiped out, no Belongings, no place for Bill to go when or if he was released from the Hosp.

When He Broke into our Apt it was \_\_\_ or \_\_\_ of August, in the middle of the month. I later learned that he didn't want a person with mental problems living in his Building so befor I could return, he had the apt painted and rented I beleave by the \_\_\_th

When my apt was being emptied a neighbour called me and told me what was taking place. I was horrified. I was 300 miles away, my Husbands in the Hospt. and I'm helpless. I called another neighbour and asked her to collect my Husbands clothes and T.V. which she did. everything else is gone my clothes, furniture Now my husband is dead. I have no place to live and zero income.

My Husband was released from the Hospital knowing he had no home to go to to (He was 57 years old and not well) If that might not have been a contributing factor to his Heart Failure. I feel a great wrong has been committed. I am very Hurt, very alone and very Angry.

Tuesday August \_\_\_

Bill called me from Hosp. and told me they were finally going to release him Wed. August \_\_\_ and to catch a bus Friday night which would arrive Sat morning Sept \_\_\_. He would meet me at the Bus Station and since we had no place to live he had made arrangements with a friend who has a trailor.

We would stay there over the labor day week end and come tuesday we would find us a place to stay.

I arrived as planned Sat morning but Bill wasn't there. I waited 2 hours, then started to phone I finally called Main General and was told he was in intensive care due to heart failure. 2 weeks later he died. - I lived at the Hospital by day and slept on a friends sofa at night in the same Apt Bld. where my Husband and I use to live, and I'm still there now.

Mary Smith

Bill entered the psych. ward in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of August. was released 3 weeks later on Wed. August \_\_\_.

Sometime thursday nite 9/ \_\_\_ Bill had trouble breathing and was taken to Western Hospital and left there. How he got to Main General or when heart failure occurred is not clear. I arrived Saturday Sept. \_\_\_. Finally found him in intensive care at Main. He was on respiration but concious and aware I was there. Monday Sept \_\_\_ he was taken off respirator was Breathing well on his own He suddenly stopped Breathing and his heart stopped they Cartiovented him 2<sup>nd</sup> time and brought him back but not until he died Sept \_\_\_ MON

I signed paper signifying no more cardioventing. To let him go, for his mind was already gone. I also signed a paper permitting an autopsy to find out why he stopped Breathing eh he shouldn't have.

until recently he had managed to control it.

We've lived in apt. 13 yrs

(20)

Dear Jane!

Write to my parents and explain and write gentle and nice, mail the upper part to them! Thank you! Love Mary

Please, go to Joe's wedding!

My Darling Bill

I love you very much, all my life, and you have been the best Husband that I have ever know.

But I can't take it any more, please, forgive me!

You know where the keys are to the Safety Deposit Boxes. One is in the Frigidaire bottom, the other one is in the green box in a brown leather case, you will find them. The leather case is from my Opa's.

Take care of yourself, and please stay healthy and live a happy life!

Please, forgive me again!

over!

We had a very good Marriage!

Safety Deposit Box at (bank)

Dear Jane, Sue, John, Tony.

Thank you for being so nice and good to me, I appreciate it very much. You have done so much for me thanks. I love you all!

Love, Mary

Please, go to my Joe's Wedding and make him happy! Please go!

And please take care of my darling Bill, he needs your help now! I hate to do this, but I can't go on any more. May God forgive me!

Love, Mary

Show Bill how to run the Washer and Dryer, and please help him out as much as you can! Stay with him!

My Parents I love very much too!

I love my Bill and my Joe sooo much!

My Darling Son Joe

I love you very much, but I can't take it any more. Please forgive me! That I can't make it to your Wedding!

Have a very happy Marriage with Sue and be happy for ever, and all your life.

Have a happy Marriage, and don't let this upset you!

Please, be happy!

you have been

a good Son.

Love you always

Mom

## Appendix D

### Instances of Occurrence of the Quasi-obligatory Moves

Move	Instances in S&F	Instances in LM	Instances in LF	Total
Addressing a recipient	30	20	11	61
Giving instructions to others about what to do after the writer's death	28	29	19	76
Justifying suicide	31	28	15	74
Expressing love	18	14	9	41
Signing off	26	23	16	65