

TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF GAVIN EUGENE LONG'S SUICIDE NOTE : A FORENSIC LINGUISTIC STUDY

Abstract

Gavin Eugene Long was a gunman who did a mass shooting in Baton Rouge in 2016. Before he was dead, a suicide note was left. The suicide note was a potential proof to investigate the deeds he wanted to convey before he was dead. Such phenomenal note deserves to be contested as the case for the present study. Therefore, this study aims at understanding the note as seen through from forensic linguistic point of view. To understand the note, Forensic Linguistic (FL) study is required to do since suicide note is in the domain of it. Since FL relies upon linguistic analysis, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework is applied. In the framework, ideational metafunction is chosen to be observed. The results of the observation show that the transitivity processes employed in the note reflect the deeds Long wanted to convey in relation to the mass shooting he did.

Keywords: forensic linguistic, suicide note, systemic functional linguistic, transitivity

Abstrak

Gavin Eugene Long adalah pelaku penembakan massal yang terjadi di Baton Rouge pada tahun 2016. Ia tewas dalam aksi ini dan meninggalkan sebuah catatan kematian. Catatan kematian ini merupakan sebuah bukti yang dapat membantu penyelidik mengungkap maksud dari aksinya. Untuk memahami catatan kematian ini, studi Linguistik Forensik (LF) menjadi dasar dalam menelaah teks sebab catatan kematian merupakan salah satu objek penelitian LF. Teori yang digunakan untuk menelaah teks ini adalah Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional (LSF) yang dirumuskan oleh Halliday. Dalam cakupan LSF, catatan kematian ini ditelaah untuk mengetahui sisi metafungsi ideasional dengan melihat transitivitas dalam teks ini. Hasilnya, proses-proses transitivitas dapat menggambarkan tujuan yang ingin dicapai penulis sebelum melancarkan aksi penembakan massal.

Keywords: forensik linguistik, catatan kematian, linguistik sistemik fungsional, transitivitas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language shares a similar characteristic with human. It changes and evolves throughout time and other kinds of circumstance. However, there is one characteristic that never changes. The primary function of it is to enable human communicate each other. The communication can be delivered through references; enabling us to describe certain condition, expressions; denoting our intentions or connoting what we think, aesthetically we put in our utterances, and small-talks that can function to make one's relationship keeps going in a society (Jacobson, 1960, p.350-377). Those mediums of delivering utterances exist in all language studies. One of the language studies that apply those media is forensic linguistics. This terminology was initiated by Jan Svartvik, a linguist, in 1968 and has become widely-known since then (Olsson, 2008, p.4).

Forensic linguistics itself, then, is “the application of linguistic knowledge to a particular social setting, namely the legal forum (from which the word forensic is derived)” (Olsson, 2008, p.2). As an applied linguistics, this study covers not only one part of linguistic study, but also more than one. The areas are: (1) “auditory phonetics”, studying about the identification of speaker in legal discourse through the sounds heard by the speaker observed, (2) “acoustic phonetics”, dealing with how a speaker’s organs of speech produces sounds. This area needs further examination for this deals laboratory test, (3) “semantics: interpretation of expressed meaning”, dealing with the understanding of words, phrases, texts that are in the domains of legal discourse, (4) “discourse and pragmatics”, enabling us to see the concealed meaning in discourses involved in the examination, (5) authorship analysis, identifying someone’s style in purpose to see intentions, (6) language of the law, how law is written and understood linguistically, (7) language used in the courtroom, involving discourses made by those who are involved such as judge and attorney, and (8) in translation related to law discourse (McMenamin, 2002).

In relation to the areas mentioned previously, the text types that can be used to implement forensic linguistic paradigm can be emergency calls, mails containing threats, suicide notes, last statements made before death row, and confessions of publicly acknowledged people (Olsson, 2008, p.128-154). Out of those text types mentioned, suicide notes are the data that are not easy to get. It is due to the fact that suicide notes are confidential texts that normally can be accessed only by those who are authoritative. However, there is still also a possibility to obtain such data in public media like the internet. One suicide note that is accessible worldwide is by Gavin Eugene Long.

Gavin Eugene Long was known as the “Baton Rouge shooter” for he was the one who performed the shooting attack on July 17, 2016 in Baton Rouge located in Louisiana, the United States. The shooting attack is considered to be a mass shooting since three people were found dead of it, and the other three were hospitalized (Advocate staff report, 2017). The suspected reason why he did the mass shooting was because of his ideology. He was reportedly active in “black separatism” movement. Black separatism itself is a movement, specifically in the US, in which people having African descent seek for improvement in economy and culture (Hall, 1987, p.1). Surprisingly, Long was in the US Marines and served for the country for years. He, then, went to Clark Atlanta University to study there for three semesters. He did not continue his study and rather chose to travel to Africa for finding his inner peace that was not connected to world-related things (Kaleem and Shyong, 2016). After that, he was active in spreading his ideas and ideology through his personal website. His active involvement in the movement had

to be stopped when he was shot to death by police after the riot. Before his death, a suicide note was found and it could be the motive upon why he decided to the attack. The suicide note's length is three pages and contains the reasons why he performed such action. In this study, the suicide note becomes the data to analyze. The aims of this study is to understand the meanings and/ or intentions by Gavin Eugene Long in committing the crime by using Systemic Functional Linguistic framework, specifically seeing the use of transitivity patterns.

Previous studies on forensic linguistics have been conducted, but not as populous as the other sub-fields of linguistics. In this study, there are two studies that have connections to the study presented in this paper. The first is the study by Malini (2016) on Virginia Woolf's suicide notes. Two Virginia Woolf's suicide notes were used to see the motives and intentions of her suicide. The data were analyzed using a computer-based application called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). By using this application, words in the notes were classified based on certain categories such as emotive, social, and style-marker words. Then, the classifications were linked to Olsson's suicide note theory. The result of the process of the analysis was the notes were proved as genuine writings by Woolf herself due to the words expressed. The words reflected her depression and surprisingly revealed that she had Bipolar Disorder.

Another study is by Waskita (2014). The study revealed the conversation in a bribery case in Indonesia which was popular at that time. The data were from the excerpts of telephone conversation by two different parties. They were, then, analyzed by using pragmatic and Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) approaches. In terms of SFL, the data were seen through the employment of the transitivity. As a result, material process could be said as the dominating process done by those who are involved. It can give a hint that those who are involved in the telephone conversation on bribery case emphasized their requests to prepare materials to perform their actions.

As mentioned earlier that those two studies have connections towards this study. The data of the the first study which were the suicide notes by Virginia Woolf are also similar to this study's type of data. What makes it different from what is done by Malini, the data in this study focuses on only one suicide note. Besides, the methodology used is also different. This study does not use LIWC to understand the words and phrases. The second study by Waskita employing SFL framework to perform a forensic linguistic analysis is related to the study presented here due to this study employs the same framework. Transitivity pattern is also seen to understand the meanings in the suicide note by Gavin Eugene Long.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The study applies mixed methods which elaborate qualitative and quantitative methods. It is said to be a qualitative study because it “uses narrative data (words rather than numbers)” (Riazi, 2016, p.256). However, this study also elaborates a numeric data which is to understand the occurrence of the data classified. The numeric data, considered as quantitative method, is not as populous as the other method. Therefore, we can classify that this study relies upon qualitative result which is supported with numerical data. In accordance to it, the data analysis follows several steps. Riazi (2016, p.256) proposes hierarchical steps to do it. First, the data which is still raw is chosen. It can be any discourses that are mainly written, in this study’s case the raw data is the suicide note written by Gavin Eugene Long. Second, the data in forms of clauses are examined in order to do segmentation and coding. Since the study is based upon ideational metafunction of the discourse, which is the suicide note, transitivity pattern is seen closely. In this part, processes and participants are explained to show that there exists both inner and outer experiences.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Transitivity Process Frequency

In the suicide note written by Gavin Eugene Long, the gunman, there are twenty five sentences. Those twenty five sentences occupy various transitivity process. The following table shows the occurrence of each process.

Process	Frequency	Percentage
Mental	5	20 %
Material	12	48%
Existensial	1	4%
Verbal	6	24%
Relational	1	4%
TOTAL	25	100%

Material processes are the most populous among the processes found in the text. It almost covers a half of the text since it reaches 48% of the whole note. The second most populous is verbal process. Gavin Eugene Long stated his ideas using verbal process six times. It covers mainly 24 % of the note. Then, it is followed by mental process which is used five times and covers at least 20 % of the thorough note. Finally, there is one in each existensial and relational process occuring. The numbers shown above reflect the experiences that Long wanted to convey through a note he wrote before he was dead.

3.2 Types of Process

3.2.1 Material Process

The most populous member of the process, as mentioned earlier, is material process. Material process enables us see the actions done as well as the effects of the actions by the actor in the discourse, in this case Long (Zhang, 2017). In Long's suicide note, material processes were used to state his anger, as well as threats, towards bad cops and judicial system that did not give fair treatment for African descent people, described as "melanated people" in his note, living in America, and strongly requested that all injustice treatment undergone by "his people", melanated people or African descent American, needed to be stopped. The following sentence shows the existence of material process showing his anger and threat towards all injustice he experienced before he was dead.

Therefore, I must bring			the same destruction that bad cops continue to inflict upon my people, upon bad cops as well as good cops in hopes that good cops (which are the majority) will be able to stand together to enact justice & punishment against bad cops..
<i>CIRC</i>	<i>Pt:</i> <i>Actor</i>	<i>Pr:</i> <i>Material</i>	<i>Pt: Goal</i>

The verb *bring* here is the marker of the material process in the statement. In the statement, Long chose the word *I* to represent himself as the person who wrote the note, and implicitly indicate that he was the one who would be responsible towards what he wrote on the note. Before the verb, the modal *must* adds the sense of urgency in the action

that is described by the verb *bring*. In the sentence, there is a participant which is labeled as the goal. The goal represents his intention or something that he was eager to do to achieve justice that he sought for himself and the people he represented. Isti'anah (2014) states that when a process or participant undergoes activity requiring effort to happen and is about to experience a change, it can be said that material process occurs. In this case, the participant labeled as the actor *I* or Long himself clearly wanted to experience a change described in the verb. His anger towards the systems could also be noticed by the following excerpt from the note. In the excerpt, the sense of threatening is stronger due to there is a conditional sentence marker *if* because it allows certain condition to determine the result of the action.

If not,	my people & the people in general	will continue to strike back	against all cops until we see that bad cops are no longer protected & allowed to flourish.
<i>CIRC</i>	<i>Pt: Actor</i>	<i>Pr: Material</i>	<i>Pt: Scope</i>

The verb *continue* complemented by the phrase “to strike back” expresses an action that contains a threat he would do in the future with the people supporting his movement. Anger still could be inferred through the use of it. The reason why material process was elaborated to express this since the idea of having another “revenge” is in the mind of Long. Then, it was realized in the choice of phrase *will continue to strike back* to give a sense that he has power and authority to do it, of course to defend his and people represented’s justice.

In relation to the idea that Long longed for a change for having justice, the idea that he strongly requested that those “bad cops” referred by him in his note also undergoes material process. Interestingly, the idea was mentioned several times by using different verbs that still reflect the use of material processes. From the following excerpts taken from his note, we clearly understand that the action words helped him express his high hopes towards the judicial system.

<p>Therefore now, if the bad cops, law makers & justice they (bad Will quit system leaders cops) committing care about the welfare.....good cops, then..</p>				criminal acts against melanated people & the people in general.
<i>CIRC:</i>	<i>Pt: Actor</i>	<i>Pr: Material</i>	<i>Pt: Scope</i>	
<i>contingency</i>				

<p>For the sake of preventing future loss of life rather I it be from the hand of the people upon good cops,</p>				(with & by the power of people behind me) for all bad cops to be punished swiftly, completely & unhesitatingly; & for all unethical police practicers & procedures to cease immediately.
<i>CIRC: matter</i>	<i>Pt: Actor</i>	<i>Pr: Material</i>	<i>Pt: Goal</i>	

The above sentences contain the phrase *will quit commiting* and *do not ask but order* both contain material processes. They represent his hopes towards the judicial system. The phrase *will quit commiting* referring to the bad cops and those evilish parties is expressed by Long and the whole sentence implicitly means that he wants to experience such stable environment with good law and system. The other phrase shows the sense of having hopes by strongly requests the parties mentioned by Long in the sentence. The verb *order* characterizing an action that is more urgent compared to merely *ask* is stated. It shows that the action that he did, ordering the parties he referred to, could clearly convey that he wanted an action to perform which is affected by the material process he employed in the word *order*.

3.2.2 Mental Process

Previously we have understood that the use of material process in Long's suicide note was to express his anger, show threats, as well as express his hopes towards the authoritative parties mentioned by him in his note. Another transitivity process that appears is mental process. It was previously stated as the second most populous process noticed in the note. The use of all mental processes here are to clarify his public image people usually saw.

I	know	most of you personally know me are in disbelief to hear from the media reports that I am suspected of committing such horrendous acts of violence.
<i>Pt: Senser</i>	<i>Pr: Mental</i> (<i>cognition</i>)	<i>Pt: Phenomenon</i>

I	know	I will be villified by the media & police, unfortunately, I see my actions as a necessary evil I do not wish to partake in, nor do
<i>Pt: Senser</i>	<i>Pr: Mental</i> (<i>cognition</i>)	<i>Pt: Phenomenon</i>

The above sentences contain the same mental verb which is *know*. What we understand as “a mental verb is that it is a verb that portrays internal world of the senser, the one or person who performs the verb” (Zhang, 2017, p.67). Then, the verb *know* reflects what was inside his mind when writing this suicide note. In the first example, there was a fact that he was recognized as someone with a good reputation and he knew it. Therefore, he tried to express what he understood in his mind as a portrayal of what appeared in his cognition. The use of mental process conveyed with the word *know* reflects also how he processed the fact that he was known as a good person.

The second *know* still reflects what was in his mind before being shot dead by the police. He, at the moment he wrote the note, processed the fact that performing such crime would affect his good image he had before the mass shooting. The awareness towards what

happened outside him was processed within himself and conveyed through the use of mental process referring to his thought. He was aware of his public image, and the effect of the riot he made. However, in the clause stated in the phenomenon in the second example “unfortunately, I see my actions as a necessary evil” is the contradicting idea that he understood, realized with the word *know* previously. Besides the word *know*, he also wrote a sentence classified as having mental process below.

You	are thinking	to yourself that this is completely out of my character of the man you knew was always positive, encouraging, & wore a smile whenever he was seen.
<i>Pt: Senser</i>	<i>Pr: Mental</i>	<i>Pt: Phenomenon</i>
<i>(Perception process)</i>		

From the sentence above, we see that the senser is not *I* anymore like what he referred to previously. Then, the senser *you*, referring to the people knowing him well, was chosen to express that the sentence focusing the senser *I* was chosen to affirm the fact that he had a good public image. The phenomenon following the process marker is the evidence showing that through this sentence, he implied that everybody knowing him had the same perception towards him who was friendly and nice.

3.2.3 Existential Process

Out of twenty five sentences written in the note, there is only one sentence containing existensial process. This process refers to the state telling that something exists or happening (Zhang, 2017). In other words, it is just used to show. It is in line with what Long wrote. In his writing, the existential process was employed to tell that a condition that he was worried about was happening. The following table shows the process as well as the participants referring to it.

Right now	there is	an unseen & concealed war within America's police forces between good cops & bad cops.
<i>CIRC</i>	<i>Pr: Existential</i>	<i>Pt: Existent</i>

There is only one participant in this process which is existent. Existent here refers to the information that is being told as a truth to tell. The fact that there is an unseen and concealed war within America's police forces is conveyed by Long through this process. Even though this process only appears once in the note, the process as well as the existent, or the information, carry a significant role in contribution to understand the whole suicide note. It is due to the fact that this marks the starting point of the topic being talked about in the note which is related to police and judicial system. Without this sentence, understanding the context of the overall text would be less possible.

3.2.4 Verbal Process

The third most populous process in the suicide note is verbal process. This process was employed by Long to express positive messages, through verbiages containing salutations, condolences, and simple statements for many parties. "Verbiages are the keys in the process due to the fact that they represent the intention or idea" said (Halliday, 2004, p.255). Due to its important, verbiages in verbal processes undergone by Long needed to take into account since the verbiages represent his messages before he was shot dead.

Condolences to my people & their loved ones who have been victims at the hands of bad cops for decades.
<i>Pr: Verbal Pt: Verbiage, Pt: Recipient</i>

As mentioned earlier that this process is employed by him to show his expression of condolence. Even though he is not stated as an explicit participant, as the sayer, the sentence still can be understood to be said by him as the sayer. Therefore, the participant sayer is not written explicitly in the table. It is only the verbiage, or the words, that is expressed and that shows the existence of the process. Then, the ones receiving the verbiage are the people and those who Long loved who experienced the injustice treatment from the bad cops. What we can carry from this sentence is that this is a kind of message that needs to be delivered to the addressed parties which are his people, African descent Americans, and those who are not considered as African descent Americans but also experienced the same treatment.

And special salute & thank you to the brave cops that have already identified & spoke up against bad cops and racist unjust practices.
<i>Pr: Verbal Pt: Verbiage</i>

Another verbiage that is taken from his suicide note is that his salutation towards the cops who were brave to defend his people against bad cops and racist treatments. The verbiage here, again, was delivered by Long himself, so he is the “implicit” sayer. The choice of words in the verbiage, not limited to this but all verbiages he wrote, is rather positive if we look at the words closely. In expressing condolence, mentioned earlier, for example, he chose *condolence* which refers to a deep sympathy towards his people. Then, in the second example the words *salute* and *thank you* imply positivity that encourages the addressed parties which are the brave cops to fight against injustice.

3.2.5 Relational Process

The last process that Long employed in conveying his messages in the note is relational process. There is only one sentence using relational process. The process in the sentence is used to show the fact that those who are considered as good cops according to Long cover the names mentioned, but here the names are censored due to trial matter.

The list of good cops	include	but are not limited to officer *****, officer *****, fellow marine & Ex-Cop *****, Retired Captain *****, former police chief officer ***** & officer *****
<i>Pt: Carrier</i>	<i>Pr: attributive (possessive)</i>	<i>Pt: Attribute</i>

The sentence contains a relational process due to the fact that the names labeled as the participant *attribute* are the participants of the good cops listed. The names attribute the information about the list of good cops Long mentioned. The use of this process is implicitly linked to the material process Long employs. In the material process seen in the sentence “For the sake of preventing future loss of life rather it be from the hand of the

people upon good cops, do not ask but order (with & by the power of the people behind me) for all bad cops to be punished swiftly, completely, & unhesitatingly; & for all unethical police practicers & procedures to cease immediately". In the sentence, he mentioned *good cops*. The good cops that are mentioned here are explained in the sentence explained employing relational process above. The fact that he knows some names of the good cops implies that he observed the cops carefully before he performed such action and finally got shot by the police. The name listing also becomes a message for those who read the note. This is potential to be an important information especially when it comes to the investigation phase of this case.

4. CONCLUSION

Forensic linguistic study is a branch of applied linguistics which enables us observe any text that is related to judicial or law process. In this study, suicide note written by Gavin Eugene Long was chosen to be the data of the study on forensic linguistics. The analysis focuses on the verbs employed by the writer. The verbs are seen through the point of view of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposing three language metafunctions. In this study, only one metafunction which is ideational metafunction observed. Transitivity, as the main focus of the ideational metafunction, was observed. The result of the discussion showed that Long, the writer of the suicide note, employed material process more. This process dominates the occurrence throughout the note. This shows that what Long referred was actually actions that eyes can testify. This refers to his deeds to show his anger and wish to stop discrimination and injustice towards his people, melanated people. He wanted to refer to actions rather than the opinion or any other thing mentioned.

In relation to it, he also mentioned some messages through the use of verbal process. The messages are still related to the parties mentioned throughout the note, namely cops and those who are involved in judicial system. The messages delivered using verbal process extend the intentions in the sentences using material process. Despite this fact, Long actually also wanted to clarify his image that might be misinterpreted due to the harmful action he did. He employed mental process to show it. The occurrence of this process is not as many as the first process mentioned. From this fact, we can say that all of the information delivered using mental process is less strengthened or, we can conclude that, less important.

In the note, there are existential and relational processes elaborated in conveying the messages in the note. However, the number of them are not equal with the other processes mentioned earlier. Each process can only be found in one sentence. Despite of it, the use of those processes help Long to deliver what he wanted to convey before he was dead. Existential process in the sentence was used to show a truth related to the messages Long conveyed. The truth that there is now an underlying war between good and bad cops can help investigators scrutinize the cops in general. This suggest an action to closely give evaluation towards the work of the cops and further makes a claim whether what Long wrote is a truth or merely an assumption. The relational process was employed to extend the explanation on the sentences employing material process. This shows detailed information and, at the same time, makes the messages in the note strong enough due to names mentioned as evidences.

Based on the discussion on the transitivity processes, inferences towards the intentions the writer, Gavin Eugene Long, can be made. The inferences can be taken into account to understand the note using the point of view of linguistics. Furthermore, the results of the discussion might be fruitful for investigators to guide the further investigation related to the case. However, analysis using Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) is more suggested to provide more thorough evidences to perform a forensic linguistic study.

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APPENDIX

Gavin Eugene Long's Suicide Note

Peace family,

I know most of you who personally know me are in disbelief to hear from media reports that I am suspected of committing such horrendous acts of violence. You are thinking to yourself that this is completely out of my character of the man you knew who was always positive, encouraging, & wore a smile whenever he was seen . Yes this does seem to be out of character but I ask that you finish reading before you make that decision.

I know I will be villfied by the media & police, unfortunately, I see my actions as a necessary evil that I do not wish to partake in, nor do I enjoy partaking in, but must partake in, in order to create substantial change within Americas police forces, and judicial system.

Right now there is an unseen & concealed war within America's police forces between good cops & bad cops . And the the way the current system is set up, it protects all cops whether good or bad, right or wrong, instead of punishing bad cops & holding them accountable for their actions.

And when good cops do try and stand up, speak out, & point out the wrong's & criminal acts of a bad cop they get reprimanded, harassed, blackballed, or blacklisted or all of

these and more. Thus creating a perpetual systematic fertile ground for bad cops to flourish, excell,& go unpunished in.

Therefore I must bring the same destruction that bad cops continue to inflict upon my people, upon bad cops as well as good cops in hopes that the good cops (which are the majority) will be able to stand together to enact justice & punishment against bad cops because right now the police force & current judicial system is not doing so.

Therefore now if the bad cops, law makers, & justice system leaders care about the welfare, families, & well-being of their fellow good cops, then they (bad cops) will quit committing criminal acts against melanated people & the people in general. If not, my people, & the people in general will continue to strike back against all cops until we see that bad cops are no longer protected & allowed to floursih.

B/c until this happens, we the people cannot differentiate the the good from the bad.

Protected & unpunished bad cops forces melanated people to label the good cops as potential threats (aka bad cops) to the saftey & well-being of our women, family & children. Good cops ask that you help change this situation that we find ourselves in by smarting from within the force & making an impact their.

For the sake of preventing future loss of life rather it be from the hand of the people upon good cops, do not ask but order (with & by the power of the people behind me) for all bad cops to be punished swiftly, completely, & unhesitatingly; & for all unethical police practicers & procedures to cease immidiately.

Condolences to my people & their loved ones who have been victims at the hands of bad cops for decades. And condolences to the good cops & their family as well. And special salute & thank you to the brave cops that have already identified & spoke up against bad cops and racist unjust practices. The list of good cops include but are not limited to officer ***** & the approximant 10 other officers who are coming forward against illegal practices of the NYPD targeting my people unethically.

Salute to officer *****, officer *****, fellow MARINE & EX-Cop *****, Retired Captain *****, former police chief officer ***** & officer *****.

And every other officer who stands up & protects & serves, and upholds their oath, even if it's protecting the people from one of their fellow offices.

Sincerely, Love Cosmo

A sacrifice for my people, & a sacrifice for the people

“Look up, get up, & don’t ever give
up!”