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Processes in Kurt Cobain's Suicide Note

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Abstract - Many researchers do their research related to Kurt Cobain's suicide note from Psychology, Public Health or media point of views, but it is limited research related to Forensic Linguistics (FL) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The aims of this research are to identify and describe both of processes and verbs expressed in each process in Kurt Cobain's suicide note. This research is a descriptive study by using qualitative method. It was reported that the four processes involved in the seventy eight clauses as the data that involving various verbs. The four processes found in the data are mental, relational, material, and verbal processes. Firstly, it was found that the mental processes in thirty two clauses with four subtypes process (sixteen clauses of cognitive, nine clauses of emotive, five clauses of perceptive, and two clauses of desiderative). Secondly, it was reported that the relational processes in twenty nine clauses with three subtypes process (twenty one clauses in intensive, seven clauses in possessive, and one clause in circumstantial). Thirdly, it was informed that the material processes in sixteen clauses with two subtypes process (twelve clauses of doing and four clauses of happening). The last, it was discovered that there was only one verbal process in one clause of report.

Keywords: Kurt Cobain's suicide note; mental process; relational process; material process; verbal process

I. INTRODUCTION

Kurt Donald Cobain was a performer that was known as Kurt Cobain. He was one of the Nirvana rock band members which were formed in Aberdeen, Washington in 1987. He was a talented artist and he became a rock legend in the 1990s. He was a cultural icon, a hero to a legion of identification hungry youth (Jobes, Berman, O'Caroll, Eastgard, & Knickmeyer, 1996). He was an American singer, songwriter, guitarist and the frontman of Nirvana. He was labelled as the legend with the albums 'Nevermind' which was released in 1991 and 'In Utero' in 1993 (Wood, 2011).

Kurt Cobain was born in Aberdeen, Washington in 1967 and he committed suicide in 5 April 1994 at age 27 but the body was found three days after his death (Mazzarella, 2008). After his death, even today, people still memorize him as an epochal rocker music which was reported by Gavin Edwards in The New York Times in his article titled "Kurt Cobain: What to Read and Watch, 25 Years After the Nirvana Leader's Death" in 5th April 2019 as the 25th years of Cobain's death. Besides the news in 2019, a year later, Ahmad

Naufal Dzulfaroh in an online national newspaper in Indonesia, Kompas.com, wrote an article titled "*Mengenang Kurt Cobain, Ikon Musik Rock Modern*" which was published in 5th April 2020. The both newspapers reported that Kurt Cobain left a lasting impression on music and pop culture until today. Not only the impression on music and pop culture but also the Cobain's death as a victim of suicide would impact on the rate of suicide in young people (Martin & Koo, 1997).

This present research applied suicide notes as the data source that is based on Forensic Linguistic approach. An argumentation mentioned that language is one of the important aspects in Law, as (Udina, 2017) argued that

"The relationship between these two systems: language system and system of law is of great importance for lawyers to understand how language issues contribute to law drafting, implementation of law, court procedures, legal expertise, police investigation, lawyer and client communication, law interpretation and comprehension by specialists and public in general."

Forensic Linguistics is one of the Linguistic branches that learn the correlation of language and law in a legal discourse or an evidence. It is stated by (Olsson & Lunchjenbroers, 2013) that "*Forensic linguistics is the analysis of language that relates to the law, either as evidence or a legal discourse*". It is line with (Ariani, Sajedi, & Sajedi, 2014) that "*Forensic linguists have an interest in understanding the language of the written law, its complexity and its origin, as well as the use of language in forensic procedures*". The data of the present research was obtained from a suicide note. Since suicide note is an evidence, so that this research paper could be classified into FL research.

A suicide note or sometimes called a death note is a message left behind when a person dies by suicide or intends to die by suicide. The suicide notes could be formed as a written note, an audio message, or a video. It is in line with the argument that a suicide note is presumably written shortly before he takes his own life—is functioning under heightened motivation (Osgood & Walker, 1959) and it is an individual will write about that debate before committing the suicide (Scheidman, 1981). Another expert argued that most suicide notes are, ransom demands and threatening letters, for example, are well under 200 words long and many consist of fewer than 100 words (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007) further, another forensic linguist argued that
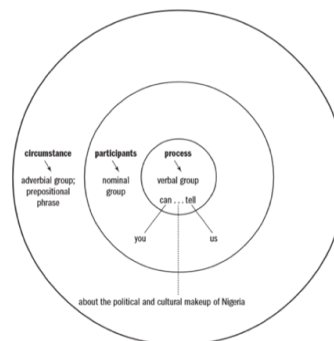
"Suicide notes and ransom notes also constitute scientific types, but they are not usually within the heavily institutionalized setting of death row prison units, whereas final statements are" (Olsson, 2008).

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach which was introduced by Halliday, and his popular book is "An Introduction to Functional Grammar" which was first published in 1985, and it was revised in 1994, and 2004 (with Matthiessen) (Sujatna, 2012b). He introduced his opinion that language is a system of meaning (Halliday, 1985). Another linguist

argued that the basic tenet of SFL is that language is as a system of choices, yet the very nature of choice is rarely considered (Fontaine, Barlett, & O'Grady, 2013). It was also in line with Halliday in (Fontaine, 2012) that people do choice in their activities. He mentioned that "*All human activity involves choice: doing this rather than doing that.*" He also added that "*Whenever something is chosen, something else is not chosen; that is the meaning of choice. What is not chosen, but could have been, is the meaning of that particular instance of choice*."

There are three lines of meanings: clause as message, clause as exchange, and clause as representation. The clause as message is represented by theme and rheme, the clause as exchange is expressed by mood and residue, while the clause as representation is portrayed by transitivity.
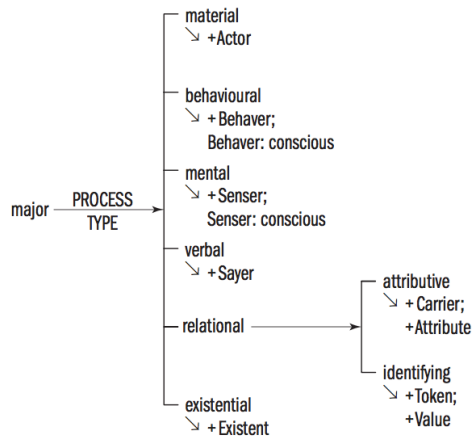
Transitivity system or as clause as representation or sometimes called as ideational metafunction as one of the three metafunctions besides textual and interpersonal metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Halliday & Webster, 2009; Sujatna, 2013). Transitivity concerns three things: processes as the main, participants and circumstances as described in the following figure.

Figure 1
Central and peripheral elements in the experiential structure of the clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)

Processes as the main topic of this research is a center of the clause which usually realized by verbs (Gerot & Wignell, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Sujatna, 2012a). There are six different types of processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes as described in the following figure.

He bought a new house.

He	Bought	a new house
Age-nt	Process: materi-al: doing	Goal

She slept quietly.

She	Slept	quietly
Age-nt	Process: materi-al: happening	Circum-stantial

Figure 2

Transitivity represented as system network (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)

Material clause is process of doing and process of happening. The material clause that represented doing and happening, is known as terminology of transitive and intransitive as described in the following.

Mental process is a process of sensing. This process has four different subtype of processes: perceptive, cognition, desiderative, and emotive. The following is the list of verbs found in the four subtype of material process.

Table 1

Examples of verbs serving as Process in mental clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)

	'like' type	'please' type
perceptive	perceive, sense; see, notice, glimpse; hear, overhear; feel; taste; smell	(assail)
cognitive	think, believe, suppose, expect, consider, know; understand, realize, appreciate; imagine, dream, pretend; guess, reckon, conjecture, hypothe-size; wonder, doubt; remember, recall, forget; fear (think fearfully)	strike, occur to, convince; remind, escape; puzzle, intrigue, surprise
desiderative	want, wish, would like, desire; hope (for), long for, yearn for; intend, plan; decide, resolve, determine; agree, comply, refuse	(tempt)
emotive	like, fancy, love, adore, dislike, hate, detest, despise, loathe, abhor, rejoice, exult, grieve, mourn, be-moan, bewail, regret, deplore, fear, dread, enjoy, relish, marvel	allure, attract, please, displease, dis-gust, offend, repel, revolt; gladden, delight, gratify, sadden, depress, pain; alarm, startle, frighten, scare, horrify, shock, comfort, reassure, encourage; amuse, entertain, divert, interest, fascinate, bore, weary, worry

The Table 1 is applied to analyze the data in identifying each verb of each mental processes found in Kurt Cobain's suicide note.

Relational process is function to characterize and to identify. This relational process has three relations: they are intensive (x is a), possessive (x has a), and circumstantial (x is at a). For intensive relational process, there are two different types: attributive and identifying. The participants in the relational clauses are token-value and carrier-attributive as described in the following.

Table 2
The principal categories of 'relational' clause
(Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)

	(i) attributive	**(ii) identifying**
	'*a* is an attribute of *x*'	**'*a* is the identity of *x*'**
(1) intensive '*x* is *a*'	Sarah is wise	Sarah is the leader; the leader is Sarah
(2) possessive '*x* has *a*'	Peter has a piano	the piano is Peter's; Peter's is the piano
(3) circumstantial '*x* is at *a*'	the fair is on a Tuesday	tomorrow is the 10th; the 10th is tomorrow

Behavioral process involves both physiological and psychological processes, and the doer is commonly human. The main participant in the behavioral clause is behaver and behavior. The present writers did not find the data as behavioral processes.

Verbal clause consists of verbal process and the main participant in the verbal clause is sayer and others participants are receiver, verbiage, and target. This verbal clause could be projecting or report verbal clause.

Existential process describes something exists or event. The verb involved in existential process is 'be', it is similar to relational process but they have different participant. The main participant in existential clause is called existent and the participant could be categorized into event or entity. The present writers did not find existential processes in the data.

Some latest related studies have been conducted by some researchers, such as (Suryatini, 2014) entitled "Analysis of English Transitivity Process with Reference to the Witch of Portobello by Paulo Coelho". This study aims to analyze the transitivity process in the clause and to find out the most frequent process type found in novel. The results of this study showed that there are six process types of Halliday's theory found in grand narrator's narration in the novel. They are Material Process; process of doing and happening**,** Mental Process; process of sensing, Relational Process; process of being and having, Behavioral Process; process of physiological and psychological behavior, Verbal Process; process of saying and Existential Process; process of existing. This transitivity pattern of process types reflects the nature of text. This text in the novel entitled *The Witch of Portobello* belongs to narrative text considered as magical realist text. The grand narrator (Athena's boyfriend) is the one that mostly involves in Material process. The

finding shows that all process types found in narrative text. Material process becomes the most frequent process. It is 46,2% of the total number of processes while non-material processes represent 53,8% in the text. By examining the Transitivity process in the text, we can explain how the field of the situation is being constructed, and have clear idea how transitivity patterns reflect the nature of the text. In addition, (Mahdi, 2017) also conducted the similar study entitled "Material Process in Transitivity of Besemah Language Clauses: Functional Grammar Approach". This study aimed to find out material processes in Besemah language and to analyze the elements of material processes found in the language. The findings of the study show that (1) the verbs *ngelipat, belajagh, ngandas, ngadum, diagai, ngaduk, beghusiq, main, ngeghap, ngenjuq, nganiaye,* and *nganyat* belong to the verbs of material process, (2) the participants in the material process can be *actor, goal, recipient, client, range,* and *instrument*, and (3). The clause patterns of material processes may be categorized into be *intransitive, mono-transitive,* and *ditransitive verb clause.*

This paper illustrates the suicide notes which were written by Kurt Cobain as a victim of suicide relating to transitivity system, especially the processes. Related to the aims of the research, this paper firstly, identify and describe the processes found in the Kurt Cobain's suicide note, and secondly, identify and describe the verbs expressed in each process found in the Kurt Cobain's suicide note.

II. METHODS

This research tries to describe and interpret the transitivity especially the processes in Kurt Cobain's Suicide Note. Based on that theory, this research is conducted in a descriptive study by using qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln argued that

"Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It

consists of a set interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representation, including field note, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Cresswell, 2007).

Since the research is a qualitative research, the data which was obtained from Kurt Cobain's suicide note was described and interpreted. The design of the research began with general statement of research questions. The research questions came from the researcher's observations and experiences with particular topics, settings, or groups. Transitivity system especially the process was applied on this research since the present researchers analyze the data by the types of process found in Kurt Cobain's suicide notes. In doing the research, firstly, the present researchers browsing and downloading the Kurt Cobain's suicide notes from https://kurtcobainssuicidenote.com/kurt_cobains_suicide_note.html. Secondly, the present writers divided into clause complexes and each clause complex is identified by each clause. Thirdly, after classifying and identifying the data, the present writers did the analysis and described the data and composed it in result and discussion.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the data obtained from Kurt Cobain's suicide note, the present writers found 78 clauses. From the 78 clauses found in the data, it is identified four different processes. The four processes are mental processes, relational processes, material processes, and verbal process, since the present writers did not find the behavioral processes and existential processes. In this part, the present writers discussed the processes found in the data which has been classified from seventy eight clauses. The process is described in details including the subtype of each process and the verbs found in each subtype process. Every verb is found in every process while every process is found in a clause. The present writers presented the analyzed data as a process in a clause or a clause complex since it was needed to describe its context.

Mental Processes

From the seventy eight clauses which were taken from the suicide note, there are thirty two clauses containing mental processes. The mental processes found in the data are classified into the four different types of verb category: cognitive, emotive, perceptive, and desiderative. From thirty two data classified the four types of verb category, the cognitive is the highest (50%), followed by emotive (28%), perceptive (16%), and desiderative (6%).

The first category, cognitive verbs as mental processes illustrate as the dominant data, it was found sixteen from thirty two clauses. Cognitive verbs refers to gaining knowledge and comprehension, such as the eight different verbs from sixteen clauses in the following data.

I've tried everything within my power to appreciate it (and I do, God, **believe** me I do, but it's not enough).

I **appreciate** the fact that I and we have affected and entertained a lot of people.

There's good in all of us and I **think** I simply love people too much, so much that it makes me feel too fucking sad.

I don't **know**!

I don't have the passion anymore, and so **remember**, it's better to burn out than to fade away.

Only because I love and feel sorry for people too much I **guess**.

For example when we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins., it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury who **seemed** to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy.

For example when we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins., it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally **admire** and envy.

Data (3) – (10) describe the clauses containing mental processes which were expressed by the cognitive verbs. The verbs *believe, appreciate, think, know, remember, guess, seem,* and *admire* are categorized into cognitive verbs since the verbs are gaining

knowledge and comprehension of the participant in each clause.

The second category is emotive verbs. It was found nine from thirty two clauses containing mental processes which were expressed by nine different emotive verbs as described in the following:

I **appreciate** the fact that I and we have affected and entertained a lot of people.

The worst crime I can think of would be to rip people off by faking it and pretending as if I'm **having 100% fun**.

Why don't you just **enjoy** it?

And that **terrifies** me to the point to where I can barely function.

Only because I **love** and feel sorry for people too much I guess.

Data (11) – (15) describe the verbs *appreciate, have fun, enjoy, terrifies,* and *love* are classified as emotive verbs since they refer to the Senser (participant) is construed as a conscious being.

The third category of verbs found in mental processes is perceptive verbs. The present writers found five from thirty two clauses containing perceptive verbs in the data. The five clauses are expressed by the verb *feel* as perceptive verbs as described in the following:

Sometimes I **feel** as if I should have a punch-in time clock before I walk out on stage.

Data (16) describes that the verb *feel* as the process with *I* as the Senser and *as if I should have a punch-in time clock....* as the Phenomenon being perceived.

The fourth category is desiderative verb. From thirty clauses containing mental processes, there is two clauses with two different desiderative verbs, as described in the following:

For example when we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins., it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and **envy**.

I have a goddess of a wife who **sweats** ambition and empathy and a daughter who reminds me too much of what i used to be, full of love and joy, kissing every person she meets

because everyone is good and will do her no harm.

Data (17) and (18) describe the verb *envy* and *sweats* as desiderative verbs as mental processes in clauses.

Relational Processes

The second highest number of processes found in the Kurt Cobain's suicide note is relational processes. From seventy eight clauses, the present writers found twenty nine clauses containing relational processes. The twenty nine clauses containing relational processes are expressed by three different categories: intensive (72.4%), possessive (24.2%), and circumstantial (3.4%).

The intensive verbs found in the data are twenty one from twenty nine clauses which were represented by four different verbs as described in the following:

Speaking from the tongue of an experienced simpleton who obviously **would rather be** an emasculated, infantile complainee.

The fact **is**, I can't fool you, any one of you.

It **must be** one of those narcissists who only appreciate things when they're gone.

I have it good, very good, and I'm grateful, but since the age of seven, I**'ve become** hateful towards all humans in general.

Data (19) – (22) describe the verbs *would be, be, must be*, and *have become* are categorized into intensive verbs, since the main participant is carrier and the other participant is attributive.

The second category of relational processes is possessive verbs. There are seven clauses containing relational processes which were represented by verb have as described in the following:

I **have** a goddess of a wife who sweats ambition and empathy and a daughter who reminds me too much of what i used to be, full of love and joy, kissing every person she meets because everyone is good and will do her no harm.

Data (23) describes verb *have* as a possessive verb expresses relational process. The seven clauses found in the data are expressed by the verb *have*.

The third category in the relational processes found in the data is circumstantial verb. The present writers found only one clause containing circumstantial as described in the following:

For example when we'**re** back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins., it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury, who seemed to love, relish who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy.

Data (24) describes that the verb *are* is classified into relational process which is categorized into circumstantial since the *back stage* refers to a place.

Material Process

Material process is identified as the third highest number of process found Kurt Cobain's suicide note. From seventy eight clauses, the present writers figure out sixteen clauses containing material processes which were indicated by two verbs categories: doing (75%) and happening (25%) verbs.

The verbs of doing data are twelve clauses containing five different verbs as described in the following:

For example when we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins, it doesn't **affect** me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury, who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy.

For example when we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds begins, it doesn't affect me the way in which it **did** for Freddie Mercury, who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy.

The fact is, I **can't fool** you, any one of you.

Sometimes I feel as if I should have a punch-in time clock before I **walk out** on stage.

I'**ve tried** everything within my power to appreciate it (and I do, God, believe me I do, but it's not enough).

Data (25) – (29) illustrate that the verbs *affect, do, fool, walk out*, and *have tried* are categorized into five different verbs of doing.

Besides the verb of doing, in the data containing material processes there are four clauses having happening verbs as described in the following:

For example when we're back stage and the lights **go out** and the manic roar of the crowds begins, it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury, who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy.

For example when we're back stage and the lights go out and the manic roar of the crowds **begins**, it doesn't affect me the way in which it did for Freddie Mercury, who seemed to love, relish in the love and adoration from the crowd which is something I totally admire and envy.

I have a goddess of a wife who sweats ambition and empathy and a daughter who reminds me too much of what I used to be, full of love and joy, kissing every person she **meets** because everyone is good and will do her no harm.

From four clauses having happening verbs, there are three different verbs as described in data (30) – (32). The three happening verbs found are *go out, begin,* and *meet*.

Verbal Process

From the data collected, it was found one clause containing verbal process as described in the following:

All the warnings from the punk rock 101 courses over the years, since my first introduction to the, shall we **say,** ethics involved with independence and the embracement of your community has proven to be very true.

From the data (33), it is shown that the clause has a verbal process as a report which was represented by the verb *say*.

IV.CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the data that related to the aims of the research, the present writers found two main things.

Firstly, it was identified and described that there are four processes found in the Kurt Cobain's suicide note and the mental process is 41%, relational process is 37%, material process is 21%, and verbal process is 1% as describe in the following table.

Table 3

Processes found in Kurt Cobain's suicide note

No	Process	Number of Data	Percentage
1.	Mental	32	41
2.	Relational	29	37
3.	Material	16	21
4.	Verbal	1	1
	Total	**78**	**100**

Secondly, it was identified and described that the verbs expressed in the Kurt Cobain's suicide note are various as described in the following table.

Table 4

Subtypes of Process found in Kurt Cobain's suicide note

No	Process	Sub-type of Process	Number of Claus-
1	Mental	Cognitive	16
		Emotive	9
		Perceptive	5
		Desiderative	2
	Subtotal		**32**
2	Relational	Intensive	21
		Possessive	7
		Circumstantial	1
	Subtotal		**29**
3	Material	Doing	12
		Happening	4
	Subtotal		**16**
4	Verbal	Report	**1**
	TOTAL		**78**

From the analysis of the data, it was reported among the four processes, the mental processes is the highest number of process found. It was predicted since the writer of suicide note wanted to express his feeling by choosing the processes of feeling in his note.

In mental processes, the cognitive verbs found are eight different verbs in sixteen clauses and they are *believe, appreciate, think, know, remember, guess, seem,* and *admire.* For emotive verbs, there are five verbs in nine clause and they are *appreciate, have fun, enjoy,* *terrifies,* and *love.* For perceptive verb is a verb *feel* in five clauses. For desiderative verbs, there are two verbs in two clauses and they are *envy* and *sweats.*

In the relational processes, the intensive verbs found are four verbs in twenty one clauses and they are *would be, be, must be*, and *have become.* For possessive verb is *have* in seven clauses. For circumstantial verb is *are (be)* in one clause.

In the material processes, the doing verbs are *affect, do, fool, walk out*, and *have tried* in twelve clauses. For happening verbs are *go out, begin,* and *meet* in four clauses.

In the verbal process, the present writers found one verb as the report verb. The report verb found is verb *say* in one clause.

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