FACULTY OF COMMERCE, HUMAN SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

A FORENSIC STYLISTICS INVESTIGATION OF SUICIDE LETTERS AND SUICIDE NOTES IN OSHIKOTO AND OSHANA REGIONS IN NORTHERN NAMIBIA

BY

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THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ENGLISH AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS AT THE NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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July 6, 2023

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

I, **Jason Kapuka Kanyama**, hereby declare that the work contained in the thesis titled: **A FORENSIC STYLISTICS INVESTIGATION OF SUICIDE LETTERS AND SUICIDE NOTES IN OSHIKOTO AND OSHANA REGIONS IN NORTHERN NAMIBIA**, is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university or other higher education institution for the award of a degree.

Signature: *Jason Kapuka Kanyama*   **Date:** **July 6, 2023**

CERTIFICATION PAGE

The undersigned certify that they have read and hereby recommend the acceptance by the Namibia University of Science and Technology a dissertation titled **A FORENSIC STYLISTICS INVESTIGATION OF SUICIDE LETTERS AND SUICIDE NOTES IN OSHIKOTO AND OSHANA REGIONS IN NORTHERN NAMIBIA** submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements for the master's degree in English and Applied Linguistics (Faculty of Human Science) Department of Communication at the Namibia University of Science and Technology.

Supervisor

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late parents. In me, they instilled the values of education. From them, I learnt to put education first. For long, I have held a dream of making them proud one day, but today, sadly, they do not live to witness this achievement.

May their souls continue resting in eternal peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RETENTION AND USE OF THESIS

I, **Jason Kapuka Kanyama**, accept the Namibia University of Science and Technology's requirements in relation to the retention and use of this thesis in the library. As per the institution's requirements, I shall submit the original copy of this thesis to the university's library, and it will be accessible for study and research purposes only.

A copy of this thesis shall also be shared with the Namibian Police Force.

ABSTRACT

Crimes related to forgery and falsification of documents are committed for various reasons. The investigation of written documents such as contracts, wills and suicide messages for evidence is significant in today's world. Since there seems to be no decline in both the crime and suicide rates in Namibia today, suicide messages must be investigated from a forensic linguistics perspective. The escalation of crime today birthed an assumption that if suicide letters and notes are only treated as such, suicide could be faked to obstruct the course of justice. As a forensic study on suicide letters and notes, the current study drew from the Codal Variation Theory by Andrea Nini (2012). Specifically, the study sought to determine the authenticity of suicide letters and notes through a lexical forensic analysis, describing the authors of suicide letters and notes in line with a syntactic forensic framework. The study also sought to evaluate the genuineness of suicide letters and notes through a discoursal forensic perspective. It adopted the exploratory research design, followed the quantitative research approach and drew from the principles of the interpretivist research paradigm. The study established that the language used in the examined suicide letters and notes contained lexical features connoting positive and negative emotions. It also observed ineptitudes in the use of the rules of well-formedness in grammar. The authors explained the motives for their suicides, made reference and directives to addressee/s. Three major recommendations were made: A forensic investigation of all purported suicide letters and notes for authenticity and genuineness should be conducted; Engagement between criminal investigation units and forensic linguists; and Forensic linguistics should be introduced as a discipline in universities in Namibia.

KEY WORDS: Forensic Linguistics/Stylistics, suicide letters and notes, authenticity, genuineness, suicide, investigation, probative value, documentary evidence

ABBREVIATIONS

AA   Authorship Attribution

CIU   Criminal Investigations Unit

KLIWC   Korean Linguistic Inquiry Word Count

LIWC   Linguistic Inquiry Word Count

PCA   Principal Component Analysis

SVM   Support Vector Machine

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Shneidman (1996) defines suicide as purposive self-inflicted demise by an individual who perceives death as the only means to get out of prolonged physical and/or psychological tension. Over the past few years, suicide has become one of the leading causes of unnatural and preventable deaths in Namibia. The suicide rate is contemporarily unprecedented in Namibia. According to the *Windhoek Express* (Hoff, 2020) statistics shared by the Namibian Police with Namibia Media Holdings, established that 486 suicide deaths took place in the country, and that in the first seven months of the year 2020, the police recorded 266 cases of suicide deaths. These findings are corroborated in a report published in *The Namibian* newspaper which established that in 2019, Namibia was ranked 4th in Africa in suicide deaths (Nembwaya, 2019). Putting into perspective the country's small population, such statistics are quite shocking, and the situation has become worrisome.

Murty (2015) asserts that about 25% to 30% of suicide deaths are accompanied by suicide letters and notes. These findings differ from those made by Douglas, Lazarides and Seketa (2019) who explain that 10% to 43% of suicides leave behind either a suicide letter or a suicide note. Ballur, Sudha and Viveka (2014) define a suicide letter or a suicide note as a message left behind by someone who has committed suicide. The most common and preferred surface on which a suicide message is authored is paper. However, Tarranum, Vaibhav, and Vinay (2015) discovered that in some rather peculiar circumstances, suicidal people sometimes make use of unconventional surfaces and unconventional writing implements to author suicide messages. In some cases, suicide letters and notes have been found authored on unusual surfaces such as body parts of suicides themselves, mirrors, walls and photographs, whereas unusual writing implements such as lipstick and liquid vermillion have been used to author suicide messages.

Ballur, et al. (2014) have also argued that suicide letters and notes do not always come in the most common handwritten form, but may also be typed and sent through mail or recorded as audio messages/voice notes or video messages. Joh and Lee (2019) define Forensic Linguistics as a branch of Applied Linguistics that applies linguistic skills, scientific analytic methods and linguistic insights to context of fields including law, crime investigation, trial and judicial procedure. Its scope of investigation extends to fields of authorship identification e.g. authorship verification, authorship profiling and authorship attribution. Fitri and Sudjana (2013) assert that forensic linguists can employ

components of language such as phonology, semantics, pragmatics, discourse approaches, and so on to investigate and authenticate suicide messages.

Olsson (2008) submits that any kind of text has the possibility to be a forensic text. Simply put, Olsson opines that irrespective of how genuine or authentic a text may appear to be, foul play and manipulation must never be ruled out. Ulterior motives may cause individuals to connive and pull off some well-orchestrated disguise to evade legal repercussions. Given that suicide does not occur by natural causes, the Namibian law has considered it unnatural. Unnatural deaths such as murder, etc. are investigated under the Inquests Act 6 of 1993 of the Republic of Namibia. Putting into perspective the fact that deceased persons cannot be held liable for offences because, practically, they cannot stand trial to defend themselves against such offence, the Act thus has stipulated suicide and attempted suicide as non-criminal acts. As such, no person shall be punished or prosecuted for committing or attempting to commit suicide in Namibia.

A suicide letter or note does not only serve as the final words of the person committing suicide, but can also serve as a valuable piece of evidence (Documentary Evidence) in case of a disputed suicide death. Section 15, subsection (1) of the Inquests Act 6 of 1993 stipulates on the admissibility of statements and interrogatories as follows:

> …'*a document purporting to be a statement under oath or affirmation by a person in connection with any death or alleged death in respect of which an inquest is held, or a certified copy thereof, shall, if it is produced at the inquest, at the discretion of the judicial officer holding the inquest be admissible as proof of the facts stated therein.''*

Based on the above subsection, if a suicide letter or note can be proven (carries probative value) it can therefore be admitted in a court of law as evidence. Since the Act stipulates suicide and attempted suicide as non-criminal acts in Namibia, the phenomenon (suicide) could be left susceptible to foul play and manipulation – if it is only treated as such, without critical investigations.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The study sought to establish documentary evidence, that is, evidence of the authenticity and genuineness of suicide letters and notes. The question of the authenticity of documents is outlined by the Anotated Computer Evidence Act 32 of 1985 of the Republic of Namibia. However, this Act only focuses on evidence generated by the computer. For this particular study, documentary evidence was sought by analysing original documents alleged to be suicide letters and notes collected from and around scenes of purported suicide deaths.

Given the escalation of suicide deaths in Namibia today, and the provision in the Inquests Act (which states that suicide and suicide attempt are non-criminal acts, in Namibia) suicide could be faked to obstruct the course of justice. The absence of such provision, as contemplated by the Act, to litigate on suicide deaths or attempted suicide in Namibia may attract would-be perpetrators and criminals to connive and commit crime/murders and mask them as suicides. Henceforth, if suicide deaths are only perceived and treated as such, or circumstances around suicide deaths are not critically investigated to prove their authenticity and genuineness, perpetrators could end up getting away with criminal acts such as murder and homicide. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that suicide letters and notes collected from or around suicide scenes be critically investigated from a forensic stylistics/linguistics perspective, especially so, given the unprecedented escalation of crime and suicide deaths in Namibia today.

As has earlier been submitted, some suicide deaths are accompanied by letters and notes. Section 15 subsection (2) paragraph (c) of the Inquests Act in Namibia, contemplates on probative value of a statement. Suicide letters and notes should be considered documents that hold probative value, as critical analysis of the content could yield relevant facts regarding the actual authors. Lexical features, general language usage and the discourse in the suicide letters and notes could be fabricated to deceive if not critically investigated. It is in light of this observation that the current study was conducted to dis/prove the authenticity and genuineness of suicide letters and notes.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study sought to conduct an analysis of the linguistic features of suicide letters and notes collected from and around scenes of purported suicide deaths committed in the Oshikoto and Oshana regions of Northern Namibia. Specifically, the study sought:

- to determine the authenticity of suicide letters and notes through a lexical forensic analysis;
- to describe the authors of suicide letters and notes in line with a syntactic forensic framework; and
- to evaluate the genuineness of suicide letters and notes through a discoursal forensic perspective analysis.

1.4 Significance of the study

In the last three years (2020-2022), Namibia has recorded an unprecedented number of suicide deaths. This predicament has become worrisome as it appears to have become a trend that is very difficult to deal with. Studies that have so far been conducted on suicide in Namibia have mainly

focused on suicide from a psychological perspective. Understanding the human psyche prior to the suicide act is paramount, mostly when the situation appears to become worrisome, as it is the case nowadays in Namibia. This is because such knowledge is essential in determining the most effective preventative and interventional measures to avert suicides. One such study that had dealt with this issue is the National Study on the Prevalence of and Interventions in Relation to Suicide in Namibia conducted by the Ministry of Health and Social Services in 2018.

The current study, however, examines this phenomenon through a different prism, that is, from a forensic linguistics/stylistics perspective by analysing the content and linguistic features of suicide letters and notes. Specifically, the study focuses on establishing the authenticity and genuineness of suicide letters and notes (as documentary evidence). As indicated earlier, forensic linguistics/stylistics is a field in Applied Linguistics that applies scientific and linguistic expertise to the analysis of documents or texts that appear to be dubious. Taking suicide into account – as well as its classification as a non-criminal act in Namibia, coupled with observing its unprecedented rate today, the phenomenon may become susceptible to manipulation and foul play.

Because of their probative value in the investigation of suicide deaths, all suicide letters and notes collected from and around suicide scenes, and elsewhere must be critically authenticated and proven, using available linguistic instruments and expertise to fish out any possible manipulation and foul play. This study is therefore considered significant to third world countries such as Namibia in that it will put into perspective the necessity of having in place competent forensic linguistics/stylistics divisions in all the regions across the country. Such laboratories will work hand in hand with the Criminal Investigation Units of the Police Force in all the regions to render assistance on matters related to the authentication of suspicious documents such as suicide letters and notes.

The study is also significant in that it is hoped that it will bring to light the subject of the admissibility of dying declarations in Namibian courts in the cases of suicide deaths which appear to be suspicious, as is the case in many other countries. Finally, the study provides, through the literature review section, some of the best techniques employed by well-established forensic bodies across the globe in the investigation of texts and documents to determine their origin.

1.5 Delimitation of the study

The study was conducted in two Northern Namibian Regions namely: Oshikoto and Oshana. The researcher visited Oshakati Police Station in Oshana region, whereas in Oshikoto region, Omuthiya and Oshivelo Police Stations were visited to collect data for the study. As a Forensic Linguistics/Stylistics study, the study dealt with the analysis of sensitive text materials, that is, suicide

letters and notes left by people purported to have committed suicide in the two Northern regions. The researcher focused on all purported suicide letters and notes authored between 2021 and 2022. As the study sought to conduct an analysis of highly sensitive materials that are not readily available in the public domain, permission, as per ethics requirements, to access such materials had to be first sought from the highest office of the Namibian Police Force, the Office of the Inspector General of the Namibian Police Force, in Windhoek.

1.6 Limitations of the study

As a Forensic Linguistics/Stylistics study which focused on the investigation of sensitive text materials, that is, suicide letters and notes, limitations were inevitable and were anticipated from the onset. Since such materials are highly sensitive, accessing them in the first place for study purposes was a big challenge as there are very strict procedures to be followed in getting access to them. For example, an official request had to be made in writing for permission to be granted and this took very long. This was a very difficult task. This is unlike in some countries in the world (according to the reviewed literature) where such materials are readily available to the public for various purposes such as study. As such, the researcher had to ensure that, as per the Department of Communication's requirements at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, all procedures were followed.

The second limitation of the study was the number of purported suicide letters and notes that were available at the selected police stations' Criminal Investigation Units. Since not all suicide deaths are accompanied by suicide letters and notes, the number that was available at all the CIU was very low and this in a way limited the amount of data collected as the researcher had indicated in the research proposal.

The third limitation was that ninety-nine percent of the suicide letters and notes investigated were handwritten. This was a challenge during the analysis as the handwriting in some suicide letters and notes was very bad. As such, the researcher had to spend a sizeable amount of time on the analysis of phrases, words and letters that were badly written.

The fourth limitation was the period within which the study was conducted. It coincided with the period during which high numbers of cases were recorded in Namibia for the second and third waves of Covid-19, and in the two Northern regions in particular. This had a negative impact on the timely review of the data for the study. This was so because some parts of the country went on lockdown and as such, there were restrictions on the movement of people from one place to another. The effects of Covid-19 pandemic saw the suspension of face-to-face teaching and learning in schools

and institutions of higher learning and subsequently, a closure of both schools and institutions of higher learning in the country. Lastly, the unavailability of related literature from the Namibian context was a challenge as all the related literature reviewed were studies conducted elsewhere.

1.7 Definition of key terms

- **Forensic Linguistics/Stylistics** – Kingston and Stalker (2006) define Forensic Linguistics/Stylistics as ''the examination of style in language for the purpose of resolving litigated questions relating to disputed authorship or meaning.''

- **Dying Declaration** – Namandje (2016) asserts that a 'Dying Declaration' is a statement, oral or written, that was made and left behind by a deceased person.

- **Suicide** – Shneidman (1993) defines suicide as an intricate and purposive self-inflicted death by an individual who defines death as the only meaningful way to escape overwhelming physical and cognitive states.

- **Suicide letter and note** – According to Ballur et al. (2014), a suicide letter or note is a message left by an individual who intends to or has succeeded in committing suicide.

- **Authenticity** – the Cambridge English dictionary (4th edition) defines the term 'authenticity' as 'genuine' or 'real'.

- **Legal text** – any text that can be used in a legal context (Olsson, 2004)

- **Suspicious text** – Hoque et al. (2020) believe that a suspicious text is a text that appears to contain suspicious contents/contents that may be fabricated/forged.

- **Probative value** – probability of evidence to yield relevant facts.

- **Documentary evidence** – evidence obtained from written documents.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Literature review provides the basis and insight into findings that other scholars in the same field have made. Insight into previous findings gives focus on the current study, thereby minimising chances of duplicating findings and research. Reviewing related literature also assists in the identification of gaps that new research could fill. In this case, the review of related literature proved significant to the current study in that it established that there appears to be less/no interest in conducting studies on the language of suicide letters and notes in Namibia, as to date there is, as far as the current research has established, no available literature/study conducted on these materials. It is the paucity of such research within the Namibian context that the current research seeks to fill.

This section presents a review of studies on suicide letters and notes conducted in different parts of the world. The related studies were reviewed under the following objectives. As established earlier on in Chapter 1:

- to determine the authenticity of suicide letters and notes through a lexical forensic analysis;
- to describe the authors of suicide letters and notes in line with a syntactic forensic framework; and
- to evaluate the genuineness of suicide letters and notes through a discoursal forensic perspective analysis.

2.2 Determining the authenticity of suicide letters and notes through a lexical forensic analysis

Documents such as qualifications, contracts, and so on can be tampered with for one reason or another. Therefore, the practice of verifying and authenticating documents and other written texts suspected to be dubious or manipulated must be enforced to ensure that such documents and texts are not used to commit crime and other unethical activities. Forensic linguistics/stylistics is a branch in applied linguistics that uses the science of language to investigate suspicious documents. Under this subheading/objective, the researcher reviewed literature on suicide letters and suicide notes to explore lexical features making up the content of such suicide texts and how these are used to determine their authenticity. It is essential that suicide letters and suicide notes' content be analysed critically. Words, the number of words used per sentence, phrases, shape of words, meaning, etc must all be critically verified to ensure that the suicide letters or suicide notes were actually authored

by the deceased. This is however, only possible if we compare these aspects of language within the letters and notes to those within other documents penned by the deceased.

Choi and Sea (2020) explore the linguistic features of suicide letters and suicide notes seeking to establish the differences and similarities between suicide letters and notes authored by prisoners and those authored by the general public using the Korean Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (KLIWC) programme that counts function words e.g., pronouns and helping verbs, and content words such as nouns and adjectives. The study established that suicide letters and suicide notes authored by prisoners contained morphemes e.g., un, anti, etc. and phrases. On the contrary, suicide letters and notes from the public did not contain these linguistic features.

Dethlefs and Schoene (2016) state that much of the work that has been done so far in forensic linguistics/stylistics has mainly focused on the identification of genuine suicide notes compared to forged ones, whereas Joh and Lee (2019) argue that establishing the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes is significant because texts and documents could be manipulated for various reasons, for example, to commit crime. These arguments rationalise the example given in the background of this study, in which a murder was committed, and the perpetrator attempted to distort the reality by making it appear as if it was suicide.

Olsson (2008) asserts that any written text has the potential to be a legal text. Literally, this assertion implies that any text could be written and used for reasons and motives other than those it appears to be intended for. Thus, if a text has been verified and proven beyond reasonable doubts that it is inauthentic, then such a text qualifies to be a legal text and the author of such a text is legally answerable to it in a court of law, as authorship of such text is tantamount to crime.

Joh and Lee (2019) further stress that the analysis of suicide letters and suicide notes from a forensic linguistic perspective is very important. Apart from shedding lights into the mind of a suicide victim prior to the fateful act, suicide letters and suicide notes serve as an important source of evidence in the identification of whether such letters and notes are authentic or not. A suicide letter and suicide note can be presented in a court of law to prove whether a questionable and suspicious suicide death is an act of manipulation or foul play, thereby mitigating the chance of criminals getting away with criminal acts in which they mask murders as suicide. Forensic stylistics/linguistics professionals therefore play an integral part in helping the courts of law to successfully litigate on suicide cases that raise concerns, through applying scientific and rigorous linguistic expertise to the analysis of suicide letters and suicide notes.

In the analysis of suicide letters and suicide notes, content proves to be of massive relevance as it imbeds the linguistic features critical to the revelation of the mental state of an individual before committing suicide. During the analysis, suicide letter and suicide note content can be segmented and analysed at different linguistic levels such as words, phrases, sentences, etc. Choi, Kim, Lee and Sea (2019) have also investigated the linguistic features of suicide letters and notes and made a comparison between the linguistic and psychological features of suicide notes and diary entries of non-suicidal people. The analysis used the Korean Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Programme to perform a comparative analysis between a sample of 56 suicide notes and 56 personal diary entries of people who had not committed suicide or displayed any suicidal thoughts and behaviours. The differences between suicide notes and diary entries of non-suicidal individuals established by the analysis are summated in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: The differences between suicide notes and diary entries of non-suicidal individuals:

Suicide Notes	Diary Entries from Non-suicidal Individuals
many words/phrases per sentence	*fewer words/phrases per sentence*
fewer modifiers	*more modifying words*
fewer numerals	*more numerals*
more first-person pronouns	*few first-person pronouns*
more second person pronouns	*few second person pronouns*
fewer positive words	*more positive words*
fewer future tense verbs	*more future tense verbs*
more negative words	*few negative words*

The findings in Table 2.1 demonstrates a basic description of the linguistic and psychological variables in suicide notes and diary entries content. The findings indicate that suicide notes' content tends to be detailed i.e., more words per sentence, with few modifying words and numerals as opposed to diaries of non-suicidal individuals. The analysis also evinces those writers made more reference to themselves and others in suicide notes, whereas such kind of reference was less in the diary entries

of non-suicidal individuals. It is also evident that suicide notes tend to have more words that refer to negativity and thus, contain fewer positive words.

Forensic linguistics professionals employ stringent methods and tools in the verification of legal texts and documents for authenticity. One of the scientific methods employed by forensic stylists/linguists in solving problems associated with authorship analyses of legal texts for authenticity is Authorship Attribution (AA). Bethard, Montes and Sapkota (2015) observe that Authorship Attribution helps in identifying who the actual author of a text or document is. Some of the Authorship Attribution features are bag-of-words, stylistics features and word and character level n-grams (n items presented in order). Bag-of words features are used to capture correlations between authors and topics. Stylistics features are used to model the authors' preferences for the use of punctuation marks, emoticons, white spaces and other writing styles. The last feature is character n-gram - which focuses on the lexical content, syntactic content and style in the authentication of documents. Bethard et al. (2015) explain that there are about three different categories of character n-grams which are used in the authentication of lexical items in written texts at different levels.

These are: **affix** n-**grams**, **word** n-**grams** and **punctuation** n-**grams**:

> **1. Affix** n-**grams** are n-grams that begin or end a word. They are: **prefix**- this covers the first n characters of a word that is at least n+ 1 characters long, **suffix**- this is a character n-gram that covers the last n-characters of a word that is at least n+ 1 characters long, and **space-prefix**- this is a character n-gram that begins with a space. From the explanation above, it can be deduced that **prefixes** are **word beginners**. When attached to certain words in a text, new words or antonyms are formed e.g. a prefix **pre-** can be attached to the beginning of the word **mature** to become **premature**, thereby forming a new word, whereas a prefix **un-** can be attached to the word **happy** to form the antonym **unhappy. Suffixes** on the other hand are **word endings**, but just like prefixes, they change the meaning of the words to which they are attached e.g. a suffix -**ment** can be attached to the end of the word **pay** and **govern** to form new words **payment** and **government** respectively etc. Since **Affix n-grams** are concerned with the formation and creation of new words, they are employed in the authentication of texts at the basic level of language.

> **2. Word** n-**grams** are n-grams that capture partial words and other word-relevant tokens. They are: **whole-word(s)** – this is a character n-gram that covers all characters of a word that is exactly n-characters long, **mid-word** - this is a character n-gram that covers n-

characters of a word that is at least n+2 characters long, and that covers neither the first nor the last character of the word and **multi-word** – n-grams that span multiple words, identified by the presence of a space in the middle of the n-gram.

3. Punctuation n-**grams**-these are preferences for particular pattern of punctuation. They are: **begpunct** - a character n-gram whose first character is punctuation, but middle characters are not, **midpunct** - a character n-gram with at least one punctuation character that is neither the first nor the last character and **end-punct** - a character n-gram whose last character is punctuation, but middle characters are not.

Every human being possesses features and qualities which are exclusively unique to him or her. Such features and qualities may also be manifested in the way an individual chooses to write certain lexical items e.g. an individual can develop a habit to write, for example, the letter 'A' in upper case when they write words, and this can be even amongst lower case letters, etc. An individual may prefer to use certain patterns of punctuation marks in a text. Thus, **punctuation n-grams** can be used in determining the authenticity of a written text at the lexical level, as it specifically looks at a particular pattern of punctuation which can either be at the beginning of a character n-gram, middle of the character n-gram or at the end of a character n-gram. An individual can have different writing styles, yet such styles remain unique to him or her.

Ameer, Nawab, Parvaz and Sittar (2015) explore different stylistics features which help in establishing and creating the personality of the author of a text. They reckon that the personality of an individual can be reflected through speech, writing, images, etc. For example, an author will have a unique way of writing certain lexical items in a unique way which differs from those of other individuals, and this can help in identifying a number of attributes about that person e.g. his/her origin, tribe, etc. Ameer et. al., also investigate how the use of different stylistics features affects multilingual results. They used the datasets provided by the PAN organisers, and applied different machine learning practices for predicting the author's characteristics. One aspect that stands out in this study, which is key to the current study, is the identification of personality traits of the author of a suspicious text or note.

The study highlights three approaches used in the identification of the author's characteristics and categorises them into three broad categories. The categories are: stylometry based approaches (which seek to identify an author's characteristics from the way he/she writes), content-based approaches (which seek to identify author's traits using features taken from the content of the text) and topic-based approaches (which focus on predicting an author's profile based on the topics used

in the text or note). According to the Collins English Dictionary (2000), "Stylometry is the study of something such as a written text so as to determine the author." A written text can reveal features which may help in identifying its writer. This can be done through the analysis of certain features such as the lexical items the writer has chosen to use in the text. Depending on the circumstances around the nature of the cause of suicide, the writer may choose certain lexical items to express his/her emotions. He or she may choose to use negative adjectives such as 'sad', 'tired', 'unhappy', 'shattered', etc. or positive adjectives such as 'peaceful', 'okay', 'faithful', etc.

With respect to content-based approaches, characteristics of the writer can be established through the analysis of certain features taken from the content of the suicide letter or suicide note at the lexical level. For example, the writer's status can be revealed through the analysis of certain features the writer has opted for in the letter or note e.g. 'my wife' would indicate the marital status of the author, whereas 'my car' indicates financial status. In this regard, traits of such writer can become known, thereby verifying the authenticity of the suicide letter or note. Coulthard (2019) proposes the notion of 'Idiolect and Uniqueness of encoding'. This implies that individual human beings use language distinctively. He argues that though it is possible in principle for any speaker or writer to use any word at any time, speakers and writers make typical and individuating co-selections of preferred words.

Coulthard further argues that every speaker has a very large active vocabulary built up over a period of time. This vocabulary differs from other individuals' vocabulary (that has also been built over a period of time). In a nutshell, Coulthard's argument points to the fact that human beings differ in character, including the way they use language. The distinction in the way language is used by individual human beings can manifest through spelling, the use of the past tense and pronunciation of words. For example, one individual may have a tendency to spell the word 'visit' as 'vist' whereas another individual can have a tendency of spelling the word 'manager' as 'mananger'. It is worth taking note of the fact that such a tendency does not exist in all individuals who use such lexical features, but it should rather be regarded as an individual's natural way of spelling such word. Other individuals have different natural ways of using language too. In this way, the authenticity of a suicide letter or suicide note can be determined through the analysis of such lexical features.

A linguistic fingerprinting concept was devised to identify linguistic features in written texts and notes, thereby attributing it to the actual author. This concept can be used in the context of forensic investigation of authorship. It can also be used in the investigation of short texts such as suicide notes. Such texts can be investigated by matching the lexical items and testing them. With

regards to suicide letters and suicide notes analyses for authenticity, lexical items can be taken from personal documents believed to belong to the writer/deceased such us notebooks, diaries, etc. Such lexical items can then be matched with lexical items found in suicide letters or suicide notes. Earlier, it was explained that human beings differ in many respects, including in the way they use language. A writer of a suicide letter or suicide note could, for instance, possess a special feature of tailing every letter 'T' in every word he or she writes. Another writer may possess the characteristic of shaping letter 'F' as capital letter 'S' in every written word. This existence of differences in human beings' usage of language plays a crucial role in establishing the authenticity of written texts at the lexical level.

Grant and MacLeod (2011) developed and automated techniques from forensic linguistics that have been successfully applied to the analysis of the contents of short messages in criminal cases. This was actually an extension of a study conducted by Grant (2007) on the analysis of authorship of short texts within the online environment. Grant (2007) particularly focuses on a corpus of micro-blogs sourced from the social networking site, Twitter. A qualitative analysis of about 18500 tweets was conducted with the assistance of Wordsmith Tools. Lexicons containing every example of a given feature as it appeared in the corpus were then created by manually extracting items from the Wordlist tool and creating plaintext files for the programmers. Lexicons were developed in this way for features such as *exclamatory onomatopoeia, initialisms* and *acronyms*, but were less suitable for features such as *whole word numeral substitution.*

A rule was developed to allow the computer to distinguish between 2 the number and 2 representing the word 'to' when is occurred as: 'to' (preposition), 'to' (infinitive marker) and 'too' (adverb). It was considered wholly possible that some authors might regularly substitute the infinitive marker with the numeral, but rarely do that for prepositional use, and vice versa. A series of grammatical rules were developed by the first author, which attempted to distinguish the different uses on the basis of the context in which they occurred. There were further distinctions to be made on the basis of spacing evidence found in the development corpus of some users inserting a space before and after the 2, while others inserted one before but not after, and others vice versa, while some used none at all, relying on the height difference of the character to visually break up the individual words.

The findings from the study point to diversity which exists in individual persons' usage of language. Although the study focused on the usage of language on social media, this does not necessarily mean that writers only tend to use language differently (writing) when writing for social media. This is so

because social media writing has a significant influence on other contexts for informal writings, such as suicide letters and notes.

There are no known rules set to regulate social media language usage to date. Individual social media users use language in ways deemed appropriate by them. Individual users of the social networking platforms are then able to coin special lexical items to use when interacting with others on these platforms. Specific characters can then be formed to represent certain words in a language e.g., letter 'X' can be used in lieu of the word 'EX', the letter 'Y' can be used to represent the questioning word 'WHY?', whereas 'COZ' represents the word 'BECAUSE'. These forms of language usage initiatives can be of substantial importance as they can assist in the authorship analysis of texts in order to determine the writers of such texts. Although the initiative is only popular among the younger generation, it can assist substantially in authorship identification through the rigorous analysis of such features in a text.

One of the tools at the disposal of linguistic analysts in the analysis of legal texts for authenticity is the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (LIWC) which Barnes and Lester (2007) describe as a computer-based programme that has the capability to provide a linguistic profile of the words used in a text. It has the ability to categorise words into classes according to meaning e.g., words showing positive emotion (happiness), negative emotion (tiredness), self-references (my, mine), etc. According to this programme, there are 72 categories through which written texts can be analysed. As the words are categorised into groups, positive and negative, this assists with determining authenticity of the text. For example, if the writer has used words which evince negative emotion rather than positive emotion, this points to the fact that the writer could have been experiencing unstable mental or physical health. Words that show negative emotions such as 'suffering', 'paining', 'bleeding heart', 'can't face it', etc. indicate that the writer had been burdened by some kind of challenges in life. The writer then decided to use these specific words to express their suffering prior to the fateful suicide act. Words that show negative emotions can give testimony that a suicide letter or suicide note is indeed authentic, thereby casting away any doubts that such letter or note had been forged.

In their analysis of the forensic properties of selected suicide notes using forensic linguistics and machine learning, Joh and Lee (2019) applied the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) software, the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method and the machine learning technique called Support Vector Machine (SVM). Through the analysis of the selected suicide notes, it was established that the SVM machine has 100% accuracy in identifying suicide notes from non-suicide notes. The Support

Vector Machine (SVM) has the ability to analyse and classify data. In this case, it analyses words in written texts and classifies them accordingly. Upon classification, the Support Vector Machine would then determine whether the text from which analysed data (words) were collected is indeed a suicide note or non-suicide note. The class of words used in the note in this case would reveal that the note is authentic and had indeed been written by the deceased.

Malini and Tan (2016) make use of the LIWC software to undertake a forensic linguistics analysis of the linguistic items found in Virginia Wolf's suicide notes (number not provided by the researchers) to prove their authenticity and genuineness. The analysis reflected the percentage of the total words within the suicide notes. The words were grouped according to meaning e.g. I-words (I, my), social words, positive emotions, negative emotions and cognitive processes. A comparison was then made between the words from the suicide notes and the average word in her personal writing. Based on the LIWC analysis of the linguistic items in the suicide notes, the study concluded that the suicide notes were genuine. Most suicide letters and suicide notes' content are packed with language that reflects depressive psychosis. As the comparison is made between contents of the suicide notes and those of the writer's personal writings, a significant difference is revealed in terms of the writer's choice of words. Personal writings tend to reflect life experiences in general, and are characterised by lexical items that, for instance, indicate satisfaction and appreciation of the beauty of life and nature, self-contentment, enjoyment, etc. On the contrary, the content of suicide notes is characterised by language that is full of internal instability such as anger, dissent, instructions, wishes, etc. The choice of words characterised by both physical and cognitive instability is evidence that a suicide note is authentic. There is no doubt that the contents of a suicide note, with words pointing to negativity towards life challenges and experiences is indicative of intended self-demise.

The analysis of texts using the LIWC was also employed by Apriayanto and Sari (2020) who explore the power of linguistic variables in uncovering hidden meaning in suicide notes written by students. The study employed the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) programme and forensic semantic analysis. The study focused on suicide notes in the form of written texts and was a qualitative descriptive one, which used computerised text analysis methods to analyse ten suicide notes written by students. The texts were entered into the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count programme to extract their language dimensions. In this procedure, the text is read by the programme and the percentage of words that reflect various dimensions is calculated. After the calculations, the percentages of each language dimension are presented in a table form. For example, the percentages of all the words that evince anger are indicated. At the lexical level, the study established that the contents of students' suicide notes consisted of unusual vocabulary, as well as death vocabulary. The study also

reveals that the suicide notes analysed were between 50 to 300 words long. Unusual vocabulary in a suicide note expresses emotional instability of the suicide note writer. It is through such vocabulary that the writer brings to light what influenced their decision to commit the fateful act of suicide. Through unusual language, it can also be established whether the suicide note is authentic or inauthentic. The use of death vocabulary in suicide notes also indicates that the deceased had intended to die. As such, this is clear evidence that the suicide note found is authentic.

The LIWC programme seems to be one of the most effective and popular programmes in forensic linguistic/stylistics investigations as it has been relied upon by a number of forensic linguists in their studies. Leenaars and Lester (2016) argue that the LIWC programme has the ability to categorise words into 73 different categories. Each word in the suicide letter or suicide note can be categorised according to its linguistic function e.g. positive emotions, anger, present tense verbs, reference to self, religion, death and swearing. The programme also has the ability to count words per sentence in the suicide letter or suicide note. Categorising words according to their linguistic functions in the analysis of suicide letters and suicide notes is essential to understanding the motives for self-killing, thereby determining whether the suicide letter or suicide note is authentic and genuine. The appearance and frequency of negative words like 'sad', 'unhappiness', 'brutal', 'sick', etc. in a suicide letter or suicide note demonstrates negative emotions, evil thoughts towards the self and others, and mental and physical instability before committing suicide. This is an indication that the writer of the suicide letter or suicide note had time to think about the act. In this case, forensic investigations can rely on such evidence to prove the authenticity of the suicide letters and suicide notes.

Fitri and Sudjana (2013) conducted a Forensic Linguistics Profiling Analysis of Kurt Cobain's (suicide) suicide note. They profiled Cobain's use of language in his suicide note by analysing lexical items through phrases, clauses and sentences. The profiling analysis revealed the usage of different negative words and clauses such as 'pit of my burning', 'I haven't felt the excitement', 'can't get over frustration', 'I am too much of an erratic', 'moody', etc. used by Cobain in his suicide note. The preferred choice of words used in Cobains' suicide note is similar to that in suicide notes written by other suicides. The words preference in Cobain's suicide notes show negativity and are typical of a disturbed mind. The words indeed prove that Cobain committed suicide and there is no doubt that he authored his own suicide note, thus rendering it authentic.

The LIWC software has indeed proven to be quite popular among forensic linguists in the analysis of suicide letters and suicide notes, as most researchers have incorporated it in the studies they have conducted. Alves-Derez et. al., (2015) conducted a linguistic analysis of suicide notes in Spain

using the text analysis linguistic software, the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count programme. A total of 23 suicide notes were processed using the LIWC programme. The results obtained were compared by age, gender and the environment of the suicide note writer. The analysis evinced that suicide notes left by women tended to have more pronouns in first person plural, denials and verbs in the past and future tenses. The author's lexical preference in a suicide letter or suicide note plays an integral part in determining whether the suicide letter or suicide note is authentic. How can this be achieved? For example, the use of pronouns in the first-person singular form points to self-reference and indicates that the writer does not blame other people for their demise, but rather admit that they are fully responsible for their own death. This can be hypothesised as a sign of unhappiness and self-discontent about life. In this case, the suicide note can be interpreted as real and the actual work of the writer.

Leenaars and Lester (2016) undertook a study in which they established that there is a significant difference in terms of the linguistic features of suicide letters and suicide notes written by men and those written by women. They observe that suicide notes written by women tend to have a higher percentage of words found in the dictionary, negations, words indicative of cognitive processes, discrepancies, pronouns, reference to self, insight words, lower percentage of articles, numbers, fewer words indicating negative emotions and present tense verbs. In general, women are known to use language that is full of emotive words, love and kindness. However, committing suicide takes place under different depressive physical and mental conditions. These conditions could be sickness, failed relationships, financial burdens, hallucination, stress, physical disability, anxiety and so forth. It is inevitable that a woman that is suffering from one or more of these conditions tends to use words which express instability of some nature in a suicide letter or suicide note, different from the words she normally uses on a daily basis.

For example, as the study establishes, women tend to use fewer words indicating negative emotions and negation. This points to the fact that even if women are known to use kind words, under difficult circumstances, a change in the choice of words used takes place. Apart from being known as people who can carefully select the kind of words to use, women are perceived to be vulnerable beings, and in many societies, they are expected to be submissive to men. Women then feel that writing a suicide letter or suicide note gives them a good opportunity to express that which they were not able to express freely when they were still alive. In this case, women for example use words that show denial and abhorrence of the situations and life they were subjected to. The use of such words is one way of showing that a suicide letter or suicide note is real and has indeed been written by the person(s) who has committed suicide.

In contrast to these sentiments made by Leenaars and Lester (2016), Lester and Black (1989) submit that women tend to write suicide letters and suicide notes which have words depicting *depression, self-hostility, confusion*, as well as words that show *sadness* caused by the death of relatives. As indicated earlier, suicide takes place under depressive physical and mental conditions. Depression can cause both mental and physical instability in an otherwise mentally and physically stable woman. Mental and physical instability leads to evil thoughts and acts of self-killing. As such, women, just like men, tend to find it difficult to deal with prolonged challenges which pose detrimental and negative effects in their lives. It is common knowledge that, because of the inferiority, perceptions and cultural beliefs attached to women in our societies historically and contemporarily, women suffer at the hands of men, and this make them uncomfortable, and have less courage to defend themselves from such social perceptions and abuse in their relationships with men.

Women tend to choose to express such frustration and depressive life through the words that they choose to use in suicide letters and suicide notes. Words showing depressed mind such as 'burdened', 'bleeding heart', 'suffering', 'suffocating' and so forth, are words which actually tell that the deceased has had an unstable and disturbed life. Furthermore, a frustrated and depressed mind functions differently from a normal mind. Many a time, the physical appearance of the individual evinces signs of instability and disturbance, which if correlated with the content of a suicide letter or suicide note, would show significant correspondence. In a way, this is strong evidence enough to convince forensic investigators to believe that the suicide letter or suicide note has not been faked, but is authentic and as such, a valid conclusion can be drawn from such.

Men on the other hand tend to use words with strong emotions and expressions which indicate that they were in some kind of troubles when it comes to responsibilities in life or at home, and they found them to be difficult to handle and solve as men or as the head of the family e.g. financial burdens, not being able to support the family in comparison to other men in the neighborhoods, being addicted to alcohol and gambling and substance abuse. As such, men tend to use words such as 'finished', 'not man enough', 'coward', 'not supportive', 'ashamed of being a man', 'can't stand being laughed at', etc. in the suicide letters and suicide notes that they leave behind. Such words can be verified by investigating the writer's mental and physical conditions prior to the suicide acts to establish if the deceased had indeed been, for instance, experiencing financial burdens and so forth. If facts around such are determined, then it can be established whether there exists correlation or not between the suicide letters or suicide notes and the conditions of the deceased around the time that the suicide was committed. If correlation does exist, the suicide letter or suicide note can then be considered as real and the actual initiative of the deceased.

Bauer et. al., (1997) in a study which focused on suicide letters and suicide notes written by elderly people, observe that suicide letters and suicide notes written by elderly people who succeeded to commit suicide tend to have content with a choice of words that revolves around loneliness, aging and illnesses related to old age. These sentiments were echoed by Black and Lester (2003) who note that content of suicide letters and suicide notes by elderly people is characterised by words that reflect ill-health related to old age and lack of care by loved ones. Words and phrases such as 'escaping from pain', 'sick' and 'hunger' are some of the words which characterise suicide letters and suicide notes written by elders. In the same vein, Foster (2003) also believes that suicide letters and suicide notes written by elderly people tend to be characterised by words which reflect that they are neglected by those who are supposed to care for them. Words and phrases such as 'burden to others' and 'helpless' were found to be some of the linguistic features characterising suicide letters and suicide notes left by elderly people.

Indeed, if the contents of a suicide letter or suicide note written by an elderly person are found to correspond with the conditions that the elderly person was living in, it can be established that the letter or note is authentic. If an elderly person has, for instance, been neglected by members of the family and living alone, it can have both physical and psychological effects on such an elderly person, and this may ultimately lead to suicidal thoughts and acts. Hence, in a suicide letter or suicide note, the elderly person would express, through carefully chosen words and phrases, the unhappiness that led to the suicide.

Canbolat (2018) conducts qualitative research on the mental representations in suicide notes written by men. As has been observed in several instances before in this paper, suicide is a phenomenon that most often takes place under the influence of depressive physical and mental states for a human being. The study conducted by Conbolat specifically focuses on the cognitive aspects of a human being in the process of committing suicide. Conbolat further argues that in most cases, this cognitive aspect or influence is manifested in suicide letters and suicide notes left behind by suicides. The manifestation of that is usually reflected through the linguistic features of the suicide letter or suicide note's content. These can be the choice of words, sentence structure and the length of the letter or note.

Grant and Baker (2001), citing Grant and McLeod (1999), postulate that, "features such as relative frequencies of function words and word frequency distributions have traditionally been brought together in multivariate models for attributing authorship, and indeed the individual's variation in their use of function words remains a popular method to this day" (p.211). This assertion can be compared to the assertion made by Yule (1938 & 1944) who shares views about the number of times (frequency) the selected choice of words appears in the text in the attribution of authorship of

written texts. The author's preferred choice of linguistic features in a suicide letter or suicide note is essential in Authorship Attribution. In this case, a comparison could work very well when it is made between word frequency distributions in suicide messages in suicide letters and suicide notes and the word frequency distribution in personal writings, such as notebooks and diaries. For example, an individual may have a personal choice of using personal pronouns when writing for pleasure. This may be the case too in a suicide letter or suicide note. If correlation is found to exist in terms of the linguistic features opted for by the writer, then the suicide letter or suicide note should be regarded as genuine.

Fernandez-Cabana et al. (2015) weighs in on the analysis of suicide letters and suicide notes, specifically, focusing on identifying genuine suicide notes. They submit that, with genuine suicide notes, authors preferred to write longer suicide notes which were characterised by more pronouns, fewer prepositions and words related to causes of self-killing, and more references to people and social processes. They also note that women tend to use more positive words, present tense and first-person pronoun. Older writers tend to use fewer pronouns in the second person.

The revelation above simply demonstrates that authors of genuine suicide letters and suicide notes differ significantly from authors of non-genuine suicide letters and suicide notes in terms of wording their suicide messages and the length preference. For example, Fernandez-Cabana et al. (2015) establish that the authors of genuine suicide letters and suicide notes preferred writing longer suicide letters and suicide notes. The study also observes that the authors tend to make clear what led to them taking their lives through the suicide acts. Reference to other people and social processes were also made in the suicide messages.

2.3 Describing the authors of suicide letters and notes in line with a syntactic forensic framework

Suicide is a traumatic experience which leaves family members distressed. As established in the background of the study, suicide is preventable, but this is not always the case, as those that commit suicide may not explicitly display suicidal signs and behaviours prior committing to the suicide act. A suicide death that occurs without any warning may pose challenges related to understanding what exactly went through the mind of the suicide victim before committing suicide. However, a suicide letter or suicide note that the deceased leaves behind proves to be a crucial source of information in terms of gaining insight into the psychological state of the suicide victim before the suicide act. Of importance is understanding that the psychological state of a suicidal individual inevitably determines the linguistic features and syntactic preferences of the author of a suicide message in a suicide letter or suicide note. In other words, the contents of the suicide letter or suicide note reflect

the mind of the author. The linguistic features and syntactic preferences in a suicide message in a suicide letter or suicide note may range from few lexical items only, simple, compound to complex syntactical structures.

To gain insight into the suicidal mind, Duch, Matykiewicz and Pestian (2009) assert that researchers have empirically analysed national mortality statistics, psychological autopsies, non-fatal suicide attempts and documents such as suicide letters and suicide notes. Duch et al. therefore establish that much of the analyses on suicide letters and notes revolve around classification and theoretical conceptual analysis, whereas content analysis has been confined to extracting direct information from suicide letters and suicide notes - such as the length of the message. The current study focuses on the analysis of the content, and it particularly pays attention to how language was used in the suicide letters and notes e.g., sentence structure, punctuations, differences in language use patterns between men and women, etc.

Linn-Gust, Matykiewicz and Pestian (2012) conduct a study on suicide letters and suicide notes content, focusing on the emotion features and latent semantic features observed in the contents of suicide letters and suicide notes. The e study sought to distinguish suicide letters and suicide notes from ordinary writings. This was achieved by examining the linguistic features selected by the author e.g. the average sentence length in the suicide letter or suicide note. As observed earlier on in this chapter, the selection of the linguistic features in a suicide letter or suicide note is significantly influenced by the psychological state of the author. The author may use well-constructed statements in a suicide message to express his or her emotions.

The sentences below were taken from suicide messages and express competency in the usage of language by the authors:

- 'I need friends, I feel bad, we can talk about stuff and not being toxic'
- 'What about your friends?'
- 'I wanna die, I wanna cut, but I don't want to, I don't want to fall in this shit again, please, please'

The sentences above were well punctuated and are an indication of competency in the use of language by the author. Apart from that, they are indicative of a depressed author.

Ananiadou et. al., (2021) assert that to better understand the linguistic features and language patterns usage of individuals who write suicide letters and suicide notes before their death, linguists have resorted to the analysis of suicide messages in suicide letters and suicide notes to gain and in-

depth understanding of the authors' psychological state prior to the act of self-killing. For instance, to better understand the author's mind and thoughts, linguists examine the average length of the suicide letter or suicide note by counting the number of sentences in the suicide message. The length of the suicide message can tell much about the author of that message e.g. whether the author had been suffering from a disease or mental instability, etc.

Rani (2021) insists that utmost importance should be given to the suicide scene for the recovery of a suicide letter or a suicide note, as the linguistic features forming the content of the letter or note serve as a window to the psyche of the author. The writing style, length and structure of sentences used by the author of the suicide letter or suicide note are a gateway to the author's mind. A longer suicide letter or suicide note is an indication that an author had carefully planned the act of committing suicide. A longer suicide letter or suicide note tends to be well organised and thought about. This is because longer content requires adequate time think about and put down on paper. So, this implies that the author had ample time to sit, think and author. As the suicide plans the act, the reasons for carrying out the act are clearly stated. A longer and well-structured suicide letter or suicide note leaves no doubt in mind that it is real. An individual with intentions of faking a suicide letter or suicide note would find no time to sit, think and author.

Chiu et. al., (1998) conducted a study in which a comparison was made between suicide letters and suicide notes left by young and elderly people. The results of the study indicate that suicide letters and suicide notes authored by younger people were longer, with content that indicates the emotional state of mind of the author. The content was also observed to consist of a number of sentences in which the author begs or asks for forgiveness from loved ones and friends for the pain his or her actions in committing suicide may have caused them. Longer suicide letters and suicide notes are indicative of the ample time that the author had to compose a carefully thought of and planned action. Suicide letters and suicide notes in which the author expresses some kind of emotional state of mind represent a life of an individual that had been strained by some kind of mental disturbances before the acts, which probably should be regarded as one the motives that led to the suicidal acts. A suicide letter or suicide note in which the author begs or asks for forgiveness in the content shows that the author regrets his or her actions and would like to be forgiven for such actions by those who would be hurt by such action.

In contrast, suicide letters and suicide notes authored by elderly people were found to be very short and evinced that elderly people were emotionally stronger than young people. Old age could be one of the reasons why elderly people tend to author shorter suicide letters and suicide notes. Elderly

people are the custodian of knowledge in every society and when their deaths are unnatural and self-inflicted, there are usually more questions than answers.

In summary, the findings of this study are telling about different authors of suicide letters and suicide notes. The findings demonstrate that there is a significant difference between suicide letters and suicide notes authored by young people and elderly people alike, in terms syntactical features, length and content. For example, young people tend to write longer suicide letters and suicide notes, which are evince emotional states of mind and begging for forgiveness from loved ones. On the other hand, suicide letters and suicide notes authored by elderly people tend to be very short and explicit. In a related study, Murty (2015) asserts that the length of suicide letters and notes ranges between a page of about 100 words to a maximum of six pages. He further observes that some notes consist of only few words, whereas others go up to a full page or more.

As has already been discussed earlier, how the author words the suicide letter or suicide note is determined by several factors and conditions such as ill-health, academic failure, family burden, financial difficulties, shame, etc. An author who committed suicide as a result of a failed relationship may tend to word a longer and detailed suicide letter or suicide note with well-structured language rather than an author who had been suffering from mental illness. A suicide letter or suicide note author who had a troubled relationship is likely to pen a letter or note longer than that penned by a mental health sufferer because an individual who had a troubled relationship had a mind that is conscious and is able to recollect detailed information related to the trouble experienced in that relationship.

On the contrary, an individual with a history of mental health problems is unlikely to recollect every detail about the suffering he or she went through. Thus, a suicide letter or note authored by an individual who is able to recollect events in a chronological order would be composed well, with well-structured language, probably longer and excellent word order per sentence (in order to prove certain individuals wrong). A suicide letter or suicide note authored by an individual with a history of mental illness on the other hand may differ significantly from that of a mentally stable individual. This is so because, due to mental instability, a mental health sufferer may not have the capacity to recollect crucial details around the problem. As such, there may be some kind of disorganisation in terms of syntactic features of the suicide letter or suicide note. Such a letter or note may consist of several incomplete statements because of mental instability. It may also be short since the author may also be physically incapacitated to write normally.

2.3.1 Body parts as surfaces to pen suicide messages

In their findings, Demirci et. al., (2009) indicate that in some rare cases, authors tend to choose body parts such as forehead, arms, etc. on which to pen suicide messages. Demirci et. al., (2009) believe that the writing ranged from single to a few words. The decision to pen a suicide message on parts of the body could be a result of the illiteracy of the author, the author not willing to reveal much about his or her death (but yet willing to say something about it), not having ample time to compose a detailed message or the unavailability of any other convenient surface to write on. In most cases, suicide letters and suicide notes are found written on paper and this makes it easy to interpret the message. Cases of suicide messages written on body parts may pose challenges when it comes to the interpretation of such messages. Interpretation could be a challenge in that the author may only use few sentences which consist of few words or in some cases, only mere words were used.

Perhaps authors of suicide messages on body parts should rather be understood as people who had carefully planned their deaths but had no ample time to compose a detailed message – and yet were willing to leave a message for their loved ones to read. As such, the message left on body parts consist of sentences or phrases with few words or mere words that the author believes would still be understood by the readers. However, a message that consists of mere simple sentences or phrases may pose some challenges during forensic investigation. For example, if the deceased displayed non-suicidal thoughts before committing suicide, a forensic investigation of a suicide message found on the body would be difficult to interpret if it consists of simple writing. Apart from posing a challenge during forensic investigation, original suicide messages on the body are buried with the body, thereby casting any chance of firsthand evidence retrieval in cases of disputed suicide deaths. This is unlike suicide letters and suicide notes written on other surfaces such as paper, wall, audio messages, etc. which can still be retrieved in their original form after the body has been buried (in cases of any suspicion regarding the suicide).

Apart from the use simple sentence structures, phrases or mere words on suicide messages on the body, suicide messages were found to have used a rather undecipherable language on parts of the body such as arms, chest, etc. in a form of single words. Like the use of simple sentence structures, phrases or mere words, the practice of wording undecipherable messages on parts of the body is very uncommon and also presents a challenge during forensic investigation. Language that is not decipherable yields unintended results as far as forensic investigation is concerned.

Earlier, it was indicated that the mental state of the author of a suicide letter or suicide note has ripple effects which affects the wording of suicide letters and suicide notes. It was also observed

earlier that suicide takes place under very extreme and emotional conditions. The author's mind is usually characterised by stress, and strained by unbearable and depressive hallucinations such that the author may tend to act unconventionally and display strange and sometimes behaviour. This may inevitably result in unusual actions such as the writing of a suicide message on parts of the body, using disorganised and undecipherable language.

Undecipherable and disorganised suicide messages on parts of the body are somewhat uncommon, but because of the conditions under which suicide messages are written, it is not impossible for an individual that is unstable mentally and physically to do such. At this juncture, it should also be observed that a human body is naturally not a writing surface, hence it is bound to accommodate only a handful of sentence structures and phrases, unlike surfaces that are naturally meant for writing on, such as paper. In such cases, a suicide that authors a suicide message on the skin manages to only pen only a few sentences which may also be disorganised. In some cases, the author may also be undecipherable in terms linguistic structures in the suicide message.

Byard and Roger (2016) conducted a similar study on skin messages in suicide and assert that skin messages represented an unusual form of suicide letters and suicide notes that could suggest that the deceased had not planned the fateful act as he/she chose the nearest surface to write on. The study reveals that instances of writing on the skin, or skin messages as it is sometimes referred to, is unconventional. The study has discovered that skin messages occur in only about 0.5% of nearly 500 suicides. Specifically, the study focused on a rare case of a man who authored suicide notes on paper, spray painted suicide messages on the interior wall of the house and on the body. The study however focused only on suicide messages found on the skin of the deceased.

The following suicide messages were found on the bodies of deceased persons who had committed suicide:

- "Love" was found written on the anterior chest wall of the deceased.
- "The beauty of a tree in the wind" was written over the left inner thigh of the deceased.
- "Take a moment to hold the ones you love" was written on the right inner calf.
- "If I get another chance to taste life I will …. throw it away to feel free" was found written on the anterior right thigh.

The study observes that these messages were only discovered during autopsy, when the bodies were undressed. Since the deceased had written other suicide notes on different surfaces, the study suggests that the deceased had carefully planned the fatal suicide act. The linguistic features used in

the messages on the body indicate that the author was quite pragmatic and preferred to use short sentences and use mere word as opposed than detailed features. The study suggests that the author's option for such linguistic preference was so because these messages were actually regarded as complementary to messages that were found written on paper and on the wall. Like other studies on suicide messages on the body, the study concludes that such a trend is quite uncommon and rarely occurs. The study also concludes that the author(s) had carefully planned his/her demise as it as was revealed by the multiple suicide notes left behind.

2.3.2 Unusual implements to author suicide messages

Behera and Swain (2015) in a study on suicide letters and suicide notes, in which the author chose a rather more unconventional manner to author a suicide message, analysed a suicide message that was authored on the body in mehndi (henna). The study asserts that 'mehndi' is a liquid substance used as a form of skin decoration commonly used by women within the Indian subcontinent. *Mehndi* is also said to be associated with positive spirits and well wishes to people on whose skin they were used.

 Suicide messages on the skin are rare and are lacking in terms of rich linguistic features and characteristics. As with other suicide message authors who left messages on the skin, the author of a suicide message on the skin in mehndi was very brief in her messages.

The following message was authored in mehndi on the deceased's body:

- ''I hate my life''

The message was found written inside the symbol of a heart on the palm of the deceased in a reddish brown colour. The analysis established that the same reddish brown colour was also discovered on the dorsum of the left hand of the deceased. The study also further notes that this was actually the only suicide message found written by the deceased on the skin, and other than that, there was no suicide letter or suicide note written by the deceased to complement the message on the body that was found. As the message appears, the author was relatively brief. The author preferred a four-word sentence to pass the message.

It has noted several times in this thesis that the authors' preference for less detailed language on suicide messages on the skin could primarily be due the inconvenience of writing on the body surface in comparison to the common surfaces such as paper. It could also be due to the author's syntactic preferences, hoping that such preferences could achieve the intended purpose. However, these sentiments should only be treated as mere assumptions as they cannot scientifically be proven to be

true. During the analysis, it was observed that the deceased had a history of marital misunderstandings with her husband, thus the analysis of message evinces and concludes that the victim was depressed, unhappy and hopeless in and with her life.

2.3.3 Bed sheets as surfaces to pen suicide messages

Buschmann et. al., (2017) conduct a study in which the author wrote a rebus on a bed sheet. The study defined a *rebus* as a form of writing in which words are represented by a combination of pictures or symbols and individual letters. Writings which consist of a combination of pictures/symbols and individual letters is artistic, and in a way show that the author of such a *rebus* had time to think about his or her death and what to compose the on the *rebus*. A *rebus* is also an unusual form of suicide message as it is very rare to find, let alone written on a bed sheet. Perhaps the most challenging task about a *rebus* is interpreting it because of the combination of symbols and letters. In this case, the author had also used three different languages which could also pose a challenge of its own to forensic investigators. The author had written in the following languages: Arabic, German and English. Numerous illustrations and writings in blue and black ballpoint pen were found on bed sheet.

The following drawings on the bed sheet by the author:

- a comic-like face with a beard
- a self-portrayal of the deceased
- a black flag
- a chessboard
- a drawing of a cross on an unidentified motif with three pillars and a downward pointing arrow

The following phrases were authored in English and German on the author's bedsheet:

- ''mom and dad'' - written between angel wings and next to it was a rhomboidal shape
- "ich mochte nicht''- translated into English as ''i do not want''
- ''bin allein weib nitch''- translated into English as ''I am alone do know''
- ''neuer termin im dezember'' -translated into English as '' new date in december''
- ''*alles was?*'' -translated into English as ''*all what*?''

At the bottom of the sheet was a drawing of a large, stylised sword, the blade of which was dripping with blood forming a small pool.

The English phrase on the bed sheet was:

- *"fuck live"* and the date ''23.07.2000'' written vertically with a heart and a triangle beside it.

Though this form of writing (rebus) on a bed sheet is unconventional, illustrations, drawings and the author's choice of words all point to the act of self-killing. Such writing, drawings and illustrations may also suggest that the author had ample time to think about the act and carefully planned what to include on the *rebus* prior to the fateful act. The author's choice of illustrations and drawings on the *rebus* may suggest that the author had been experiencing some form of mental challenges. For example, a drawing of a cross on a *rebus* may be a symbol that the author believed in Jesus as their Savior as well as his relationship with Him. Therefore, the author may have felt that he was better off dead, as he felt he was going to be saved.

2.3.4 Other suicide letters

Abaalkhail (2020) investigates the suicide genre in suicide letters and suicide notes with the goal of gaining insight into the psychological nature of people who leave behind suicide letters and suicide notes – and the suicide phenomenon in general. Gaining insight into the psychological nature of suicidal individuals makes it possible for other people to better understand the final thoughts and behaviour of people contemplating to commit suicide. The investigation established that people who leave behind suicide messages share common linguistic features which form the suicide letters and suicide notes genre.

This genre revolves around the following features in suicide letters and suicide notes:

- Giving instructions to others about what to do after the authors' death
- addressing a recipient
- justifying suicide
- expression of love
- signing off

The findings above indicate that authors of suicide letters and suicide notes speak the same language. This implies that the authors experience the same challenges, which they address in suicide letters and suicide notes. For example, expressing love to family members and friends and providing a justification of the suicide are quite common in suicide messages.

Handelman and Lester (2007) in a study on the suicide notes' content from attempters and completers of suicide seek to gain an insight into the minds of suicide letters and suicide notes'

authors who failed to complete the suicide acts, and those who managed to complete the act. They do this by carrying out an analysis of the contents of their suicide letters and suicide notes. The study submits that suicides who manage to complete the act of self-killing usually compose suicide letters or suicide notes with fewer metaphysical references, more social references, and more positive emotions. This is in contrast with suicide letters or suicide notes authored by suicides who fail in their attempts to commit suicide. The contents of suicide letters and suicide notes written by those who completed the act differs from those of the suicide letters and suicide notes authored by those who failed in their attempts.

Through content analysis, the study established that authors of suicide letters and suicide notes who completed the act made fewer references to 'out of the ordinary' phenomenon such as hallucination or psychosis. It was also established through content analysis that the preferred syntactic features made more references to social phenomenon such as marital affairs, academic failures, financial burden, etc. as some of the reasons resulting in decisions for self-killing. Finally, content analysis revealed that the suicide letters and suicide notes' authors who managed to complete the suicide acts evinced positive emotions towards life and others. For instance, in some cases authors indicated their love for those they are leaving behind and wished them well. They also apologised to family members, friends, and workmates for their actions.

Below are positive messages in suicide letters and notes by some of these authors:

- "stay strong and positive without me around"
- "I wish I could live longer"
- "I am sorry for the pain the action I took may cause the entire family"
- "you have a bright future ahead"
- "I see a bright star in you after my departure"
- "I love you so much"

The statements above are indicative of the fact that, although committing suicide takes place under distressful cognitive states, the authors of suicide letters or suicide notes may still be mentally capacitated to express heartfelt positive emotions towards those that they loved. The authors typically outline what they feel for their family, friends, work mates, etc. Such positive emotions towards loved ones may be interpreted as a way to soothe and ease the pain the author caused. The authors also express such positive emotions hoping that reading the suicide letter or suicide note left will help the loved ones to heal and find closure.

The following are references made to other people and social processes made in suicide letters and suicide notes:

- "John must take responsibility for
  my death"
- "I hope they are at peace now
  that I am no more"
- "addiction to cocaine took better
  of me"
- "I can't bear the pressure that comes with being head of the family"
- "It seems that everybody wants to reject me because of my condition"

The sentiments above are indicative of suicide letters and suicide notes authors' intentions to let other people know that their death came about as a result of other people or as a result of certain social factors. The sentiments reveal that some suicide message authors blamed either family members, friends or workmates for their self-killing acts. Others found themselves trapped in social circles in which they found it difficult to escape, and as such, put the blame on social phenomenon such as substance abuse or pressure that comes with being head of the house or family. Others felt that they were rejected by other people, hence felt lonely and in the process came to the decision that death was the only way out of that pain.

In an attempt to understand what directs, the minds of the authors of suicide letters and suicide notes, Lester and Zhang (2008) rather use a different approach, which is largely based in attempting to comprehend the suicidal mind from a theoretical perspective by invoking the Strain Theory of suicide. They opine that the Strain Theory of suicide postulates that strain that results from conflicting and competing pressure in the individual's life leads to suicidal behaviour. This theory assumes that it is strain, in the form of psychological suffering, due to conflicting tension and pressure, which the sufferer may or may not have knowledge of, and which is in the extreme, that the sufferer has to find a solution to release or cease.

It is clear that the Strain Theory of suicide attempts to highlight behaviours that lead to people committing suicide. Pressure and tension that build up in an individual's life is number one key. In some instances, the sufferer is conscious of what he or she is going through at a particular moment, whereas in some cases the sufferer is completely unaware of their condition. This therefore warrants the motives and drives to commit suicide to be significantly diverse. The findings of this study concur with those in Fernandez-Cabana et al. (2015) who note that authors of suicide letters

and suicide notes differ significantly when it comes to the wording of the suicide messages that they leave in their suicide letters and suicide notes.

In simple terms, the word 'strain' can be defined as extreme forces that affect the mental state of an individual at a particular time. Specifically, the study invoked principles of the Strain Theory of suicide in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the human mental state of in which during or around the time of committing suicide which inevitably also affects the wording of the suicide message in the suicide letter or suicide note they author. The Strain Theory of suicide establishes that suicide precedes a series of periods of extreme pressure and stress of the individual's mind. Since the mind may become overwhelmed by intense thinking, hallucination, invisible images, etc. an individual may or may not be conscious of what he or she is going through at that particular moment. As has already been established in this paper that, through observation and content analysis of several research papers on suicide letters and suicide notes, suicide letters and suicide notes' authors pen significantly different suicide message content. This may be a result of different of what The Strain Theory of suicide observes. For example, the analysis of different suicide messages in this paper that were written on different surfaces, indicates that suicide messages that were found on unconventional surfaces such as body parts and bed sheets were shorter while those found written on other surfaces such as paper were longer.

Table 2: Presentation of a simple comparison between suicide messages written on unconventional surfaces and suicide messages written on conventional surfaces:

Suicide Messages on Unconventional Surfaces	Suicide Messages on Conventional Surfaces
''I do not want''	"I can't just keep quiet and watch my family suffer because of me"
''I am alone do know''	"All these who are the cause for me to take this extreme step should be imprisoned"
''I hate my life''	"After trying multiple treatments without curing my mental illness, I have realized that a solution other than death just doesn't exist"
''Fuck live''	"medication, therapy, counseling, alcohol-I have tried everything and I can't seem to figure out a way out of this, I can't crack the code"

It can be observed from the comparison in Table 2 above that authors of suicide messages on unconventional surfaces tend to write shorter suicide messages. Shorter suicide messages do not offer much information about the author and the circumstances around the suicide. As such, such messages may pose a challenge during forensic analysis. On the other hand, suicide messages on conventional surfaces tend to be longer and detailed. In this way, better insight about the author is gained, thereby understanding the events and circumstances surrounding the suicide.

Ballur et al. (2014) assert that leaving a suicide note shows the desire and intention to show family members and friends the reasons for the act of self-killing. The reasons for self-killing would normally determine how the author eventually words the suicide message in a suicide letter or suicide note and what not to write. Suicide victims who had experienced unbearable situations for extended periods of time e.g. suffering from chronic diseases or psychological problems tend to write detailed suicide letters or suicide notes with varying syntactic structures, in which they express their suffering, what they believe they would achieve when they are no more, what they wish to be done for and to them, etc. This augments the assertions made by Lester and Zhang (2008) when they invoke the Strain Theory of suicide in an attempt to understand the suicidal mind. They focus on the mental

state of the author before committing of the act and depending on the state of the mind of the author, a suicide message is authored accordingly, outlining and giving details about events and circumstances that led to the suicide.

Douglas et al. (2019) contribute to the knowledge on the study suicide letters and suicide notes. They believe that the authors of suicide letters and suicide notes reflect their distressed and frustrated minds and a corpus of emotionally charged data through suicide letters and suicide notes. These letters and notes often contain spelling mistakes, aside from rambling and vague allusions. These sentiments also speak to the findings of the analysis made by Lester and Zhang (2008) on the mental state of the authors of suicide message. The study observes that the mental state of the author of a suicide message is compounded by stress and allusions. Content of the suicide message in the suicide letter or suicide note may be characterised by disorganised writing patterns such as asides and inaccurate writing, which may be manifested through spelling errors, wrong word order and grammatical mistakes. As such, it is clear from the assertions made about the mental state of the author that the wording of suicide messages in suicide letter and suicide notes is significantly determined by the mental state of the author.

Lester (2009) establishes that men who leave suicide notes tend to have more statements reflecting internalised anger in comparison to suicide notes left by women. Prolonged anger, which builds up internally, can negatively affect the psyche and physical state of men, leading to suicidal thoughts and behaviour which ultimately culminate in the act of self-killing. It was also established that there was a tendency for more notes to be penned by men. These notes include instructions to those left behind and a mention of financial difficulties. Thus, through content analysis, details about the wording of the suicide messages will be determined. For instance, through content analysis, Lester, in his analysis of suicide letters and suicide notes, was able to determine that men tend to write more suicide notes compared to women. In the suicide message in the notes left by men, prolonged anger was stated as the main problem that leads to men taking their own lives.

The quotes below from two of the articles were authored by men, and express anger and frustration:

- "fuck live"
- "after trying multiple treatments, without curing my mental illness I have realized that a solution other than death just does not exist"

The two statements above were extracted from suicide letters and notes authored by men. Such statements clearly demonstrate that the authors were agitated by life or by situations they found themselves in. The statements differ in length, but both indicate some kind of unhappiness and frustration by the authors.

Lester and Young (2011) conducted an analysis of suicide letters and notes and assert that individuals who leave behind suicide notes view them as important instruments that assist in gaining insights into their psychodynamics and thoughts. Suicides who leave behind suicide letters and notes write them in such a way that they would have certain effects on the intended readers' mind e.g. sympathy, revenge, or perhaps to project an image that would remain vivid in the minds of the readers for a long time. The analysis reveals that authors of suicide letters and notes opt to present themselves as victims of persecution and abuse and tend to shy away from their actual deeds by choosing to employ certain linguistic features and structures. This choice of words or lexical items may also be determined by the mental state of the suicide at a particular time.

The quote below indicates how a suicide has portrayed herself as a victim:

- "all these who are the cause for me to take this extreme step should be imprisoned"

The statement above is an example of a suicide message authored by an individual who believes that he or she was victimised by other people. The author believes that events or circumstances around their death were as a result of other people, thus blaming them for that.

Another study on suicide letters and notes was conducted by Bromley and Lester (2007) who present an existential-constructivist theoretical model in an attempt to understand suicide and suicidal thoughts and behaviour. This model represents a meaning-based theoretical approach which serves as a gateway to the minds of authors of suicide letters and notes. Proponents of this model suggest that the existential concerns are related to *death, the inherent meaningless of existence and existential isolation* and provide the underlying, though remotely, motivation for the construction of understanding the nature of the act of self-killing. The existential-constructivist theoretical model was invoked in order to understand the suicide phenomenon better. This model looks at this phenomenon from three viewpoints i.e. death, the inherent meaningless of existence and existential

isolation. In summary, this model attempts to gain insight into why death occurs. In this case, it attempts to understand why suicide occurs. According to this model, there exists an inherent meaningless of existence. This implies that death in general is believed to occur because life is not worth to live. In the case of suicide, people tend to commit suicide because they do not see the point of being alive.

The statement below was authored by an individual that felt hopeless in life before committing suicide:

- "medication, therapy, counselling, alcohol –I have tried everything and I can't seem to figure out a way out of this, I can't crack a code"

The author of the statement above appeared to be fed up with life and saw no point of continuing to exist, hence saw no value in living. He or she saw no worth in continuing to live, inevitably ending his or her life.

Bromley and Bester extract a more proximal four-factor suicide motivational model. This model includes considerations of spiritual, psychological, social or relational and somatic needs. The four aspects are considered basic human needs; hence their deprival leads to immense psychological strain which ultimately leads to a perception that death is the only possible form of relief from such strain. Spiritual, psychological, social and somatic needs are essential basic human needs. Lack or shortage of these needs may lead to severe and detrimental physical and mental conditions. A human being that is cut off from contact and social life with other human beings may, for example, become dejected and develop suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Suicidal thoughts and behaviour may ultimately end in suicide and the suicide victim often expresses motives culminating in the act.

2.3.5 Suicide letters and notes by young and old authors

Lester and Reeve (1982) examine suicide letters and notes authored by both young and old persons. A sample of 52 suicide notes of which 48 were from completed suicides, and 4 were from failed suicide attempts were examined. The analysis sought to explore the differences in the contents of suicide letters and suicide notes based on age. The analysis establishes that the ages of the authors of suicide notes were moderately associated with a smaller ratio of verbs of feeling to verbs of action and were less explicit in stating suicide as their intention. The study establishes that the age of the writer were not associated with the length of the notes (either words, thought units, or words per thought units) the number of positive, negative or neutral units, the number of notes, the percentage of adjectives relative to verbs, the percentage of pronouns or possessive adjectives referring to

others rather than the self, the dramatic quality of the notes, the presence of instructions, the mention of suicide in the note, the note being disorganised or choice of an active versus a passive method of suicide. The study also reveals that the only parameter that made a difference was that of gender, as the study identifies that the notes authored by males contained more negative thought units and were rated less often disorganised. The study concludes that older authors of suicide notes tended to be more concerned with feelings rather than action and less explicit about their forthcoming suicidal action. In summary, the study established that there were no noticeable differences in the suicide letters and suicide notes content in terms of the ages of their authors. The analysis also observes that the contents of the suicide notes or letter did not clearly state that the authors intended to commit suicide. Finally, the analysis notes that the length of the suicide letters and suicide notes was not in any way associated with the ages of the authors.

Lester and Linn (1996) conduct a similar study with a focus to explore the differences in the contents of suicide letters and suicide notes based on gender and age. A sample of 40 suicide notes was examined to determine whether there were any noticeable differences in the contents of suicide letters and suicide notes authored by young and older people. The analysis also explored content difference between suicide letters and notes authored by males and females. The analysis established that the content of suicide notes authored by older people evinces fewer feelings of inadequacy and more indication of illness and grief over widowhood. The findings on the content differences in suicide letters and suicide notes authored by young and older persons resonates with the findings by Ho et al. (1998) who establish that suicide letters and notes authored by elderly people feature sentences which express illness related to old age as well as loneliness as the leading motives for committing suicide. Despite these findings, Lester and Linn (1996) admit that the content analysis of the differences in suicide letters and suicide notes in terms of gender proved difficult to draw conclusions on.

However, in the majority of suicide letters and notes investigated, the authors mentioned the following as motives for their self-demise: *feelings of others, blaming oneself, blaming others, clear anger, subtle anger, low self-esteem, grief-stricken, widow(er), feeling defeated/overwhelmed feeling hopeless/helpless, unable to show feelings, feeling unworthy, incurable illness, performance failure, failed relationship and feeling sorry for self.*

Most authors of suicide letters and suicide notes seem to have indicated similar challenges in the suicide messages that they left. These sentiments were first made by Rockett and Stack (2016) who believe that authors of suicide letters and notes tend to use language that expresses the burdens

that compounded and characterised their psychological states prior to the act of self-killing e.g. financial constraints such as bankruptcy, unemployment, relationship problems, legal problems with the criminal justice system, depression, mental health problems, etc.

Alfian (2018) conducts a linguistics pragmatic analysis of Nusadi's suicide note written to his parents to determine its meaning as well as what led to him to commit suicide. The study sought to explore and establish the author's motive and intention for committing suicide. This is done through analysing the linguistic features and expressions in the suicide note. A thorough analysis of Nusadi's suicide note reveals that the author used expressions which were inexplicit in nature. In other words, the suicide message in the suicide note evinces a positive message towards his parents. However, it was not the case that author was at peace. Upon closer scrutiny, the utterances represented an emotionally strained Nusadi which should be interpreted as the motive for the act of self-killing.

Below are quotes taken from Nusadi's suicide note which he addressed to his parents:

- ''Dear, My Parents….''
- "It's been 18 years, since I was born, I always get everything from you."
- "You treat me like I am only one and there's nothing this stupid boy can do to pay what you both done to me."
- "The biggest sacrifice, effort, and everything."
- ''Even though I have been angry at you, you will always be the best mom ever''
- ''I had learned a lot from you. You are the greatest motivator in my life, there's nobody who can replace you''
- ''But, just so know that you are the greatest father in the world''
- ''Mom and Dad, thank you for everything you give to me in my life''
- ''I am proud I could spend my life with lovely people like you''
- ''I LOVE YOU, MOM & DAD''
- ''MAY GOD ALWAYS BLESS YOU''

Although the quotes above, extracted from Nusadi's suicide note, reflect that it was authored from a positive perspective, the fact that suicide was committed clearly denotes a different perspective to the suicide note. The author addressed his parents, in the suicide note, from a pragmatic point of view. As it appears, the author chose to focus on the positive side of his relationship with his parents by expressing positive feelings towards them, rather than being negative. For instance, the author stated that he was grateful to have spent his life with lovely people like them and thanked them for everything they gave to him in his life. However, the author was clearly emotionally troubled, hence

the decision to commit suicide. According to Fleuchen and Gloholt (2013), the contents of suicide notes communicated the difficulties that made the authors to end their lives.

The analysis establishes the following to be some of the communicated difficulties reflected in suicide messages in suicide letters and suicide notes content:

- Inner pain
- Aggression
- Mental illness
- Depression

The study focused on the analysis of suicide letters and notes which were in essay form and philosophical in writing. Through a content analysis of the suicide message, it was established that asking to be forgiven for self-killing and wishing one's loved ones and friends the best of luck was common in most suicide messages. The author also questioned whether to continue suffering or to opt for the relief of death. Some authors spelt it out explicitly, in the suicide message, the location where the act would take place as well as the manner in which the act would be carried out. The analysis concluded that a suicide letter and a suicide note reflect the author's state of mind before the act. It also depicts content characterised by linguistic features that depict negative emotions. In the suicide message, the author makes explicit the motives and drives for committing suicide.

Kishor et. al., (2015) suggest that to comprehend the suicidal frame of mind of the authors of suicide letters and notes, an analysis of documents such as suicide letters and notes can be a very good starting point. After the act of suicide has been completed, there is usually little evidence to speak to the mind of the author since he or she is now dead. Materials such as suicide letters and notes therefore serve as a critical component that speak to the state of mind of the deceased. It is therefore a good starting point to commence investigations with the analysis of suicide letter and notes.

Kishor et. al., (2015), in their study, analysed a total of 22 suicide notes in order to gain insight into the minds of the authors of suicide messages and establish that the length of suicide letters and notes ranged between a few words to over a hundred words. Most of the notes analysed were not addressed to any person in particular. However, there were those addressed to parents, spouses, the media and the self. The themes analysed replicated themes of suicide letters and notes from other parts of the world. For instance, some suicide notes indicated reasons for suicide as distressful events and situations, the loss of loved ones, problems at work and martial issues.

Below are emotions and feelings expressed in the suicide letters and notes by the suicides:

- ''I think I committed a mistake.''
- ''Expected? Decided?''
- ''I can't just keep quiet and watch my family suffer because of me.''
- ''All these who are the cause for me to take this extreme step should be imprisoned.''
- ''It was all about me and my silly mistakes.''
- ''I think this is the only daring act of my lifetime!! Ha…Ha….! Goodbye.''

The linguistic features in the suicide message extracts above point to the fact that the authors of the suicide letters and suicide notes suffered from different life challenges which culminated into suicide.

> e.g. "*I can't just keep quiet and watch my family suffer because of me.*''

The words used in this statement indicate that the author feels that they are a burden to their family and believes that the family will only stop suffering once he/she is no more.

> e.g. *"All these who are the cause for me to take this extreme step should be imprisoned."*

The above extract from a suicide message shows that the author is shifting blame on others and holding them for their decision to commit suicide. As such, they express the feeling that justice should be served in this regard and those whom they blame for their suicide be punished. It is quite evident from the statements above that they were authored by the deceased themselves, as they replicate those expected to be penned by a troubled mind.

2.3.6 Suicide letters and notes authored by people affected by mental illness and mental healthcare deficiency

Furqan et. al., (2019) conduct a study on suicide letters and suicide notes authored by people affected by mental illness and mental healthcare deficiency. According to Goldman and Grob (2006, p. 4-5), ''[m]ental health is a state of successful performance of mental functions, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and an ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity… Mental illness is the term that refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterised by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning."

The study specifically focused on the following two questions:

1. How are mental illness and mental health care experienced by suicide decedents who leave suicide notes?

2. What role do these experiences play in their paths to suicide?

In simple terms, these two questions attempt to seek answers on the effects of mental illness and mental health care on both the psychological and physical state of a human beings and the role played by the two in the path to committing suicide. The study establishes that that the language characterising the content of suicide letters and notes by authors who had a history of mental illness and mental health care deficiency may reflect the following: irregular thinking patterns, change in emotion, anger and hatred toward the self and others. Goldman and Grob further observe that mental illness is characterised by the impaired functioning of the brain. This definition concurs well with the sentiments above. On the other hand, mental health is characterised by normal functioning of the human brain. Impaired functioning of the human brain severely affects a human being's general conduct and behaviour towards life and other human beings. This represents the fact that mental illness and lack of mental health care have a significant influence on the psychological state of the sufferer which may lead to committing suicide.

The following are quotes extracted from different suicide letters and notes authored by mental illness sufferers and mental healthcare deficiency:

- "It doesn't matter how many treatments I try, there is something so wrong with me. It's not the treatments, it's me."
- "I had so much in life – family, friends, career – but I let the disease, addiction, and my own personality take over me and it ruined everything in my life. Looking back, there were times that I should have changed the course of my life but I didn't and now there is no hope left."
- "Forgive me. It's not my fault, it's a disease, I hope you can understand that."
- "There is a problem in my brain. I think the chemistry is all wrong. No one could have fixed that."
- "After trying multiple treatments, without curing my mental illness, I have realised that a solution other than death just does not exist."
- "Medication, therapy, counselling, alcohol – I 've tried everything and I can't seem to figure out a way out of this, I can't crack the code."

The extracts from suicide messages on the suicide letters and notes are characterised by language full of emotions, despair and distress. Mental illness and the lack of mental healthcare can lead to

unbearable hardships which ultimately get the better of the sufferers. In the process, they find it hard to continue living, thus opt to stop living and die to ease the suffering.

For example, from the extracts, the expression "*After trying multiple treatments, without curing my mental illness, I have realised that a solution other than death just does not exist"*, demonstrates how the author clearly divulges how he/she on many occasions attempted to overcome the burden of mental illness by administering different treatments, but all to no avail. As such, the unceasing mental illness culminated in the suicide act. The extract "*Medication, therapy, counselling, alcohol – I've tried everything and I can't seem to figure out a way out of this, I can't crack the code"* also evinces that the author had tried a multiple number of times to get a cure for the suffering that they had been experiencing. The medical healthcare seemed to not have succeeded in curing the sickness. The last option to stop the suffering was to commit suicide.

2.3.7 Effects of emotions on handwriting in suicide letters and notes

Abrol and Mathur (2021) undertake a study on the effects of human emotion on the handwritings on suicide letters and notes. Committing suicide is believed to be a phenomenon that takes place under super-charged emotional and physical tension Because of being under stressful and depressive conditions, the author of a suicide letter or suicide note's natural handwriting may alter. Due to change that may occur in the thinking patterns, behaviours and general conduct of an individual, the natural way of writing on surfaces such as book, the wall and so on may significantly change. This implies that behavioural and emotional change in people have certain effects on their natural ways of writing.

Abrol and Mathur (2021, p.49) define emotion as "a mental state that developed from the brain after receiving signals from the nervous system associated with thoughts, behavioural changes, feelings, displeasure or degree of pleasure." They assert that feelings can either be a positive or negative experience that is associated with a certain example of psychological movement. An individual's emotions result into diverse psychological, social and subjective changes. External factors such as financial bankruptcy, academic pressure, etc. on the author's emotions, may also potentially have some effects on the author's handwriting - since suicide letters or suicide notes are written under severe pressure and tension. Mechanical factors such as the surfaces that authors choose to write on, the writing implements and the position of the author while writing the suicide letter or suicide note may also have an effect on the author's handwriting.

In the study, a comparison was made between suicide letters and notes, and handwriting characteristics such as general writing or class features, personal features and stylistic features to

establish the effects that the emotions of an author of a suicide letter/suicide note may have on his/her handwriting. The study concludes that,

> "while there are some parameters like spacing, size, number of words per line, reason for suicide, the last wish of the writer and the identity of writer, spelling mistakes, mode of corrections, alignment which shows notable variations in the handwriting of the writer under both normal conditions (during the time of natural writings) and (emotional disturbances while writing suicide notes), and which can differentiate the handwriting of person under different conditions. But the majority of the handwriting characteristics do not show enough significant variations which can distinguish the writing of individual under several states of mind. The parameters such as speed, movement, simplifications of words, repeated words, emphasising on characters remains specific to a particular writer" (p. 50-51).

2.3.8 Drawings on suicide letters and notes

Behera et. al., (2018) conduct a study on self-portrayal in diagrammatic suicide notes. Six suicide notes were examined. The study examined suicide notes within which authors used both written contents and drawings to express their emotions and experiences. The study sought to analyse drawings as well as the structural characteristics of the written content to explore the linkage between the two.

The following characterise the drawings and diagrams found on suicide notes:

- The drawings and diagrams ranged from 1 to 14 pictures which depicted various kinds of shapes of elements of nature such as the sun, grass, clouds, etc.
- One suicide note was mostly in the form of diagrams as the integrity, clarity, small details, emotional expression and intent reflection presented in the drawings were suggestive of thoughtful and conscious decision of the person.

The following explain the structure of the language on the scripts of suicide notes:

- Correct punctuation marks were used, spelling errors were common in most suicide notes and repetition of sentences were found to be more characteristic of lengthy notes

The study concludes that there were only a few common characteristics identified from the drawings in all the five suicide notes analysed, such as deep psychological problems, immaturity, ego problems and negative emotions. However, there was a correlation between expressions of thoughts and emotions reflected in the written contents and the drawings which established the suicide risk factor more concretely. When the two are combined (drawing and writing), this gives more clarity on the

suicidal behaviour of the author of the suicide note. Some of the core psychological aspects of the author's personality were better expressed in the drawings than in writing, whereas feelings were better expressed through writing. The relationship between the written content and drawings in the suicide notes was author specific. The suicide note content was made up of negative psychological states; the corresponding drawings also expressed similar characteristics with much focus on personality aspects and deep emotions.

2.4 Evaluating the genuineness of suicide letters and notes through a discoursal forensic perspective

The genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes is one of the key aspects that fall within the scope forensic linguistics/stylistics analysis. A written document can be manipulated for various purposes e.g. one can create a counterfeit *will* of unsuspecting family members in order to profit from it unethically. As such, the verification of suicide letters and suicide notes for genuineness is a crucial aspect in forensic linguistics/stylistics analysis. This is because this plays a major role in forensic investigation in the gathering of crucial and valuable evidence pertaining to the actual cause of death. It can also assist legal practitioners to successfully litigate on disputed suicide cases. In order to prove the genuineness of suicide letters and notes, a critical and scientific analysis of the discourses (content) of such letters and notes is essential.

Artinopoulou et. al., (2020) examine the narrative roles in suicide letters and notes. Their examination specifically focused on the suicide letters and notes' content. The examination identified four suicide letters and suicide notes authors. Below are four types of suicide letters and notes' authors as revealed from the discourses thereof:

- Egotistic victim
- Anomic hero
- Altruistic professional
- Fatalistic revenger

- ***Egoistic victim***

An egoistic author of a suicide letter or suicide note tends to be self-centred and always plays victim. As such, the suicide letter or suicide note tends to feature syntactic structures which portray the author as a victim of persecution and social injustices. The authors view themselves as innocent souls and henceforth tend to blame other people for their unnatural demise.

- ***Anomic hero***

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An anomic author of a suicide letter or suicide note had self-isolated from other people for some time for certain reasons. Loneliness ultimately leads to suicide. The author behaves peculiarly prior to the act of self-killing e.g. hallucinating. Thus, peculiar syntactic features may appear in the content.

- *Altruistic professional*

This author tends to use syntactic features that show kindness towards others. The author claims to love and have interests at heart for those he or she is leaving behind.

- *Fatalistic revenger*

The author chooses linguistic features that indicate revenge against other people. The author feels that opting for such language would cause pain to those he or she believes were the cause for him or her to take such a decision to end their own life.

Talaga et. al., (2020) conduct a study on the semantic and emotional structure of suicide notes with cognitive network science. The study focused on the analysis of the language and contents of suicide notes. By analysing the language and content of suicide letters and notes, unique insight into shared features of individual experiences and understanding of the cognitive processes that accompany suicidal ideation will be gained. This is because in some cases, suicidal individuals may pretend to be normal and evade showing suicidal thoughts and behaviours, and as such, others would find it difficult to detect any abnormality in them. The study established that suicide letters and notes represent a potential breakthrough into the mental states of people who completed the act of self-killing. This implies that the linguistic features in the content of suicide letters and suicide notes reveal and bring to light what characterised the psychology of the individuals who completed suicide. A deeper analysis of the linguistic features of the content describes the authors of the psychological states prior to the commission of the act. e.g. depression, mental illness, social injustices, etc. The study observes that linguistic features used by authors of suicide letters and notes revolves around the following themes: anger, love and the wish to die.

Individuals who complete suicide and leave behind suicide messages use linguistic features through which they indicate their anger, hatred and frustration directed towards certain individuals whom they thought to have caused dissatisfaction in their lives. For example, an author may write, 'I hate you so much' to show anger and hatred. An author of a suicide note may also write, 'I can't bear this terrible condition anymore, it is better to die' to indicate his or her wish to end his or her life because of an imagined unbearable condition. In summary, an author of a suicide letter or suicide note tends to use syntactic features which are influenced by his or her current physical and psychological state.

An author that is suffering from a heart condition would, for instance, author a letter or note with content and linguistic features expressing pain or suffering of some kind.

Chaudhuri et. al., (2020) assert that the analysis and verification of suicide letters and suicide notes add much needed and valuable evidence to establishing a crime in case of a suspicious suicide death or to cast away any suspicion about homicide. Verification can be done through the analyses of discourses (contents) of suicide messages in suicide letters and suicide notes left by people who managed to succeed in committing suicide. In the study, fourteen (14) suicide letters and suicide notes were analysed to prove whether they were actual work of individuals purported to have committed suicide. A perfect starting point in this regard would be to look at some of the motives for committing suicide as this is what forms discourse of the suicide letters and notes (content). The following are motives for committing suicide which made up the discourses of suicide letters and notes as pointed out by Chaudhuri et al.: failure in examination, torture by in-laws, unbearable life problems/incurable disease, failure in crop farming, poor economic conditions, blaming others for self-killing or blaming no one for the act.

Mahfudurido (2019) asserts that a suicide note is one of the interesting pieces of evidence in forensic linguistics which may shed light on the suicidal behaviour of the note writer. He points out to linguistics aspects in suicide letters and notes such as the emotional aspects, messages, expectations and motives. In this case, the linguistic features in a suicide message left by a married young lady were analysed to establish the note writer's message and the underlying motive for committing the act of self-killing. The results of the analysis suggest that the note writer left several messages directed to relatives such as apologies and requests. The analysis also revealed that the motive for suicide was that the note writer felt that she failed in her duties as a housewife. The statements below could prove that the suicide letter was actually genuine:

- "I deeply apologise for all the mistakes I have committed to you so far, that made you angry."
- "I also apologise to everyone"
- "Beg you look for a better wife who can take care of you and who doesn't cause trouble like me." "Don't be sad."
- "I ask you to bury me next to our house."
- "I want you and your wife to stay in this house."

The extracts above, representing the suicide message taken from a suicide letter are explicit and indicative of the author's intentions and unhappiness in her marriage with her husband. The author pointed out these as the reasons for her making the fateful decision to take her own life. The author

explicitly spelt out in her suicide message, a number of things that led her to take the decision. She also spelt out several directives that she wanted her husband to carry out once she was dead. Christensen and Ford (2017) assert that forensic linguistics is a field in applied linguistics that is central to the analysis of different linguistic aspects e.g., grammar, syntax, semantics, etc. It analyses all aspects of human language. It applies the science of language to issues related to the law. Some of the aspects falling within its scope of analysis and investigation are e-mails, contracts, text messages, confession letters and recorded speeches.

Suicide letters and notes fall well within this scope of investigation because, according to Olsson (2008), such written texts have the potential to be legal texts too. A legal text can be used in a competent court of law as evidence, when need be, to litigate on a case that appears to be dubious. No possibility must be ruled out as crime has reached an unprecedented stage nowadays. Akkaya et. al., (2014) evaluate and discuss the genuineness and authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes in the city of Eski?ehir. The study evaluated a total of 168 forensic deaths which represented 42.1% of suicide deaths committed between 2001 and 2011. Among the suicide messages found were *written suicide letters and notes; telephone messages (sms) or messages via social network site.*

The study specifically focused on the content (discourses) of these materials. As has been established through the analysis of research papers on suicide letters and notes, discourses of suicide messages in suicide letters and notes particularly revolve around issues related to motives for committing suicide, hatred, instructions to family members, mental illness, etc. Subjecting suicide letters and notes to critical evaluation and forensic linguistic analysis in this regard, is key as it has the potential to yield critical results pertaining to the determination of the genuineness of such letters and notes, or whether they were simply dubiously authored to defeat the course of justice. As such, to determine whether a suicide letter or note is genuine, the analysis of the content/discourses of suicide letters and notes from a forensic linguistics perspective is crucial. The valuation/analysis conducted on suicide messages left by suicides from Eksi?ehir established the following to be features of suicide message content/discourses: religious matters, failed marriage obligations, prolonged illness, shame and feeling of guilt, failure in life and financial burden etc.

The study concludes that a suicide note serves as an important document in suspicious suicide cases as it can be investigated for genuineness. The discourses, among other things, bring to light what led to the alleged act of self-killing. The verification of the discourses/themes of suicide letters and notes is therefore, of massive significance in forensic linguistics/stylistics, as it determines the genuineness of such texts, thereby attributing the text to the actual author. For example, if the purported author of a suicide message is known to have had a history of marital problems, then the forensic analysis

of such a suicide message could focus on seeking for linguistic features in the discourses that match such marriage life. If there is a match, then it can be assumed that such suicide letter or note was indeed authored by the deceased person and thus, is genuine.

The conclusion made is in consensus with assertions made by other researchers in forensic linguistics/stylistics studies such as Olsson (2008), Alhumsi (2019), etc. who postulate that any text or a suicide letter or note has the potential to be a forensic text, and that the forensic interpretation of the discourses/themes of suicide letters and suicide notes plays a critical role in determining the genuineness of such texts, thereby proving to be significant in criminal investigations, forensic evidence and forensic analysis.

Therefore, at this juncture, a genuine claim can be made that the verification of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes is a key aspect from a forensic linguistics/stylistics point of view. Forensic linguists/stylists are professionals who possess exceptional experience in the field and can apply scientific knowledge to explore various linguistic features and properties of suicide letters and notes to detect and determine whether they were genuinely authored or were manipulated to defeat the ends of justice.

Cai et. al., (2020) investigate suicide letters and suicide notes from Shanghai and Wuhan in China focusing on "putting the blame on others in suicide letters and suicide notes". The content/discourses in suicide letters and notes investigated during this study evinced how the authors of suicide letters and notes blame other people for their deaths. As the content/discourses in the suicide letters and notes were analysed, the blame on others was categorised into four categories.

Below are the four categories into which the blame on others was observed:

- *In this category the content/discourses of the letters/notes indicated that letter/note leavers suggested that people they blamed for their deaths were the ones responsible for their death.*
- *In the second category, the discourses/content revealed that letters/notes leavers expressed inherent hatred towards people they believe are responsible for their action they took.*
- *In the third category, letter/note leavers cursed those who they believed were responsible for their deaths.*

- *In the last category, the content/discourses revealed that they did not blame anyone for their demise.*

Investigating suicide letters and notes in which the purported authors made reference to other people as the ones responsible for their deaths is critical in determining the genuineness of the suicide letter or note. In this case, the people who were referred to in the suicide message in the suicide letters and notes can become part of the police investigations. Such particular individual or individuals would be contacted and interviewed by the police to testify whether the claims that were made against them in the suicide messages are true or false. If the individual being blamed for inducing or in any way leading to the deceased to commit suicide can confirm the sentiments made in the suicide message against him or her, then the suicide letter or suicide note can be regarded as genuine.

In case of a suicide letter or note in which the purported writer made reference to others as the ones responsible for their death, it should be noted that some suicides may portray themselves as victims of social injustices, thus attempt to frame others in an attempt to hide their actual deeds. In this case, thorough scrutiny of all circumstances and events leading to the suicide must take place.

2.4.1 Text comparison technique, circumstantial evidence and language level

Basim (2015) conducts a study in Authorship Attribution of suicide messages in suicide notes and letters using principles from Applied Linguistics. Basim elucidates that Authorship Attribution is a branch of authorship identification which aims to explore the linguistic features of a piece of writing in order to establish its author. Establishing of the author of a text is essential in forensic linguistics/stylistics. The study examines a suicide note left by an army brigadier whose family was alleging that he was murdered. The allegations were that the suicide note found on him was fabricated or was authored under coercion from those who were being suspected of his death. In the analysis, the study applied linguistic techniques commonly used in Authorship Attribution to analyse the discourse of the suicide note. One of the techniques applied in the analysis was the 'text comparison technique'. The text comparison technique compares two texts by the same author in order to verify whether there exist any similarities and differences in terms of linguistic features such as verbs, articles, tenses, punctuation marks, etc. present in the two texts.

The 'text comparison technique' was applied in the analysis of the army brigadier's suicide note. Verification was made by comparing the suicide note (form and content) purported to have been authored by the army brigadier and a personal text written by the same army brigadier. The form

and content in the two texts demonstrated that there were no discrepancies in terms of the linguistic features. In other words, the linguistic features in the two texts were found to be corresponding. This discovery led to a conclusion that the suicide note had not been fabricated or tampered with but had actually been authored by the army brigadier. As such, it was confirmed to be genuine.

The 'comparison technique' is reliable because it compares linguistic features from different texts written by the same author. It was highlighted in the Theoretical Framework that language is a medium of communication that functions in the same way fingerprint's function. Every human being uses language distinctively i.e., writes and speaks differently and distinctly from others. Therefore, this uniqueness in linguistic features in individuals makes it possible to identify who authored a particular text by comparing linguistic features from two texts written by the same individual. In this case, it was possible to establish whether the suicide note was indeed authored by the army brigadier, or it was an act of fabrication, as the family of the deceased had alleged prior to the forensic analysis.

Rani (2021) asserts that one way of determining the genuineness of suicide messages in suicide letters and suicide notes is the 'corroboration of the content of the suicide letter or note with circumstantial evidence'. Circumstantial evidence can be interpreted as evidence collected on events that took place around the time of suicide. In this case, more information about the reason/s to commit suicide can be sought from relatives, friends, workmates, neighbors; etc. about the mood, behaviour and attitudes displayed by the deceased around the time that the suicide was committed. The information obtained from such people can then be correlated with the linguistic features from the suicide letter or note to examine if there is any correlation. For instance, if the author of the suicide letter or suicide note was known to be suffering from mental illness and the content of the letter or note indicates the reason for committing suicide as such, conclusions can then be drawn that the letter or note is actually genuine. Or, if workmates have noticed unusual behaviour and conduct, e.g. arriving or leaving late from work, abnormal drinking, quarrelling with workmates, etc., this can also be used as evidence to prove that the suicide letter or suicide note is genuine.

The nature and circumstances under which suicide deaths take place pose a challenge to those interested in preventing or mitigating suicide deaths. Ceballos-Espinoza and Chavez-Hernandez (2016) admit that the complexity of the nature of the suicide phenomenon makes it difficult to diagnose individuals with suicide thoughts and behaviours. Suicidal thoughts and behaviours are not easily predicted or detected, as individuals with suicidal thoughts and behaviours may be

evasive in displaying such behaviours and thoughts. This is quite evident in most suicides, as they actually take place undetected and without warning.

However, persons who commit suicide who leave behind suicide letters and notes see it as a way of letting other people to gain insight into their psychological state prior to their death. It has been observed several times in this thesis that a suicide letter or a suicide note serves as a crucial source of evidence in case of a questionable suicide death. It has been established earlier in this paper that suicide letters and notes serve two important functions in forensic linguistics investigations: *window to motives for self-killing, and proof of the genuineness of the suicide.*

It should be noted with utmost caution that a mere presence of a suicide letter or note after a suicide death should never trigger investigators to draw conclusion that a death was actually an act of suicide. As such, suicide letters and notes should not be treated lightly without proving their genuineness. The contents or linguistic features of suicide letters and suicide notes are very crucial in establishing whether the suicide letter or note has indeed been left behind by the deceased or it has been faked to cover up a homicide or murder. Ceballos-Espinoza and Chavez-Hernandez (2016) explain that leaving a suicide letter or suicide note is considered a way of sharing and expressing thoughts and feelings, as well as bidding farewell to loved ones. The content (discourses) of suicide letters and notes tends to include what led the person committing suicide to such a fateful act, as well as what the deceased wish to be done after he or she has passed. A suicide letter or suicide note in which the writer bids farewell to his or her loved ones, friends, neighbours, workmates and so on should indeed be regarded as a genuine suicide letter or suicide note. This is so because, in the case of a faked suicide letter or note, the probability of a perpetrator to know the victim's relations and associates is very minimal, thus impossible to bid farewell to people one is not familiar with.

O'Connor and O'Connor (1999) hint that the analysis of suicide messages in suicide letters and suicide notes paves the way to understanding suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Understanding suicidal thoughts and suicidal behaviours may be a challenge without suicide letters and notes. O'Connor and O'Connor's observation augments sentiments made by Ceballos-Espinoza and Chavez-Hernandez (2016) when they explain that a suicide letter or suicide note sheds lights on the mind of an individual who succeeded in committing suicide. Some individuals with suicidal thoughts and behaviour could not be at ease to express their feelings and thoughts about what they go through or what they cannot bear or handle while they were alive. Rather they chose to take a different route by writing a suicide letter or suicide note.

As professionals in the science of language, forensic linguists can apply their knowledge and expertise to verify and determine the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes through critically analysing the discourses of suicide letters and suicide notes. As stated before, the contents of a suicide letter or note help to comprehend the psychological state of the suicide prior to the act of self-killing. El-Sacran (2016) weighs in by submitting that, ''One of the main aspects of forensic linguistics is the analysis of texts to determine their authorship. In this case, forensic linguists subject disputed documents to careful and close scrutiny in terms of their style, grammatical structures, lexis, semantics, pragmatics and a host of other linguistic features'' (p.18). For justice to prevail, disputed or ambiguous texts ought to undergo a thorough forensic linguistics analysis to establish the identity of the author.

According to El-Sacran (2016), the analysis of a text to verify its genuineness examines the linguistic features of the text such as words, meanings, sentences, etc. El-Sacran further narrates that, "the language of the text and its layout are compared and contrasted against the expected language level and formality of the sender's institution, guided by the intertextuality principle" (p. 18). As the linguistic features which form up the text under scrutiny are analysed, they are measured against a certain language standard to establish similarities and differences which could be there to determine and establish the author, thereby verifying the genuineness of the text. This could be the author's level of education or the language standards of the author's workplace. The language standard can also be used to determine the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes. The language standard/level used on the suicide message in the suicide letter and suicide note can be correlated to the language standard in personal writings of the deceased to determine is the two standards match. If the two standards are found to be matching, this is an indication that the suicide letter or note was authored by the deceased. In the case of = a mismatch between the two standards, there is a great chance that such a suicide letter or note has been faked or manipulated.

2.4.2 Traces of native language or place of origin

Ameer et. al., (2015) expand the knowledge in the forensic stylistics field. Their study put emphasis on individuals' linguistic differences. The study specifically observes that individual human differences are not only manifested through physical features such as height and skin colour but can also be manifested through spoken language as well as written language. Apart from differences which could physically be observed through written texts and utterances made, a critical forensic linguistics analysis can also reveal traits such as gender, native language, level of education, etc.

In this regard, a good example of how a suicide letter or note can be analysed for genuineness is by identifying the linguistic features of suicide messages in a suicide letter or note which have traces of the native language of the individual purported to have authored the suicide message. If traces of the native language of the purported writer are present in the suicide message, the suicide message may then be regarded as genuine. As with other researchers in forensic stylistics or forensic linguistics, Ameer et al. have also indicated that authorship analysis helps to identify the author of a suicide letter or note as well as identify suspicious texts by critically analysing them.

Citing *The Art & Humanity Research Council*, Ariani et. al., (2014) deliberate on the use of linguistic evidence in legal proceedings, as well as the need for legal practitioners and linguists to work together to solve issues pertaining to crime, theft and dishonesty in legal proceedings. AHRC (2009) further make an assertion about Author Identification to determine the genuineness of written texts by invoking the principles of forensic linguistics analysis. "The identification of whether a given individual said or authored a piece of writing relies on the analysis of their idiolect, or particular patterns of language use (vocabulary, collocations, pronunciation, spelling and grammar)" (p.2).

The Art & Humanity Research Council (2009) articulated that Authorship Identification of disputed documents and utterances put into perspective the linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling of words. These assertions echo those of EL-Sacran (2016) who asserts that forensic linguists subject disputed documents and texts to careful and close scrutiny in terms of linguistic features such as grammatical structures, lexis and other linguistic features. Linguistic features such as spelling of certain words may play a role in determining the genuineness of a suicide letter or note e.g., the writer may have a tendency of spelling the 'visit' as 'vist' or 'writing' as 'writting'. This may help in the identification the author's place of origin, thereby determining the genuineness of the text.

Prasad and Tamboli (2019) share views on Authorship Attribution to determine the authenticity and genuineness of written texts. They assert that, "Authorship attribution aims to identify the writer of unknown text and categorise it to a known writer. Writing style of each author is distinct and can be used for the discrimination" (p.1). Prasad and Tamboli's view with regards to authorship of disputed and suspicious documents concur with the views propounded by other researchers as indicated earlier. For example, they share a similar view that each individual has a distinct style of writing and speaking. This assertion holds water, and as indicated earlier in this paper, a writing style functions

as fingerprints and as such, it can be proven by analysing and comparing various linguistic items found in a text.

"The authors' identification depends on the individual's analysis of their idiolect. In the forensic stylistic context, written and spoken materials are subject to scientific analysis for determining the measurement of content, speaker identification and meaning, or determining the authorship in order to identify plagiarism" (Alhumsi, 2019, p. 84). Alhumsi's views echo the views of several other researchers quoted earlier. For instance, Alhumsi presents views about individual's idiolect. The notion of the author's idiolect was also shared by several other researchers such as Coulthard (2011), who talks about the uniqueness of individuals' use of language. This helps in identifying the author of a disputed text by analysing the language used, using the appropriate forensic linguistics tools.

Citing McMenamin, Malini and Tan (2016, p. 92) propound that, "the primary areas of research in forensic semantics are the interpretation of words, phrases, texts, ambiguity in text and laws, and interpretation of meaning in spoken discourse." Forensic semantics is another area in Applied Linguistics that analyses the meanings of words and sentences. In this case, Forensic Semantics complements forensic linguistics/stylistics in the analysis of vague and suspicious texts. Such texts could be any text, including suicide letters or suicide notes. In the case of a vague text, such analysis could lead to the identification of the actual author of the text thereby determining its genuineness and authenticity.

Gadit (2007) asserts that the contents of suicide letters and notes revolve around social problems which ultimately take a toll on the individual to a point where such an individual feels that life is not worth living anymore. As such, an individual decides to write about unbearable social circumstances that could not tolerate any more in life, leading to a catastrophic decision of ceasing to live. Gadit further establishes that being a burden to others, forced marriages, frustration of unemployment and high expectations from family members were some of the identified social problems that lead to suicide. As indicated at the beginning, the discourses (content) can determine the genuineness of suicide messages and as such, conclusions can then be drawn from the kind of discourses in the suicide letter or suicide note if the text is genuine or whether it has been faked for some purposes.

Madni et. al., (2010) reveal that family troubles and a history of psychological illnesses are some of the main discourses of suicide letters and suicide notes. Suicide letters and suicide notes in which individuals use linguistic features that express hardship and other social problems can lead to a conclusion that such letters and notes are genuine. For example, if an individual who was known to

have been suffering from mental illness for a long time left a suicide letter or suicide note that is characterised by language that expresses prolonged suffering, this can point to the conclusion that such a letter or note was indeed authored by the deceased.

Murtaya and Triyono (2018) make a contribution to the forensic linguistics/stylistics by hinting that linguistic practitioners play a crucial role in legal proceedings in courts of law. Forensic stylistics experts help with the examination and interpretation of written documents and spoken materials that seem to contain skeptical and ambiguous language in the courts of law by applying scientific forensic linguistics techniques such as 'the comparison technique' which compares linguistic items from two different texts by the same author to determine genuineness. This tells of the important role that forensic linguistics expertise offers to the legal system in solving critical and dubious cases.

Citing Hewit, Alhumsi (2019, p. 84) opines that, "the skills expected of a professional forensic translator as well as the code of professional responsibility in connection with the performance of the interpreter include knowledge and skills, accuracy and completeness, impartiality, avoidance of conflict of interest, confidentiality, limitations of practice, and professional development". This implies that a forensic linguistics/stylistics practitioner should have adequate experience in the forensic stylistics or linguistics field in order to be able to provide effective and unambiguous service. On top of that, displaying utmost professionalism in the rendering of service is key at all times.

Haines et. al., (2004) investigate suicide messages in order to gain insight into what motivates the authors of suicide letters and notes to commit suicide. Specifically, the study investigated suicide letters and notes authors' motives for committing suicide by sex and age. Unlike previous studies that were conducted with regards to authors of suicide letters and notes based on sex and age, this study was based on a larger sample of 262 suicide letters and notes. The investigation identified differences both by sex and age. Below are some of the differences identified:

- Linguistic features in the content of older suicide letters and notes authors indicated their motives to commit suicide as escaping from pain (associated with old age), rather than anger towards other people.
- The linguistic features also indicated that older authors did not show difficulties related to romance as their motive to commit suicide.
- On the contrary, linguistic features in the suicide messages authored by females showed escaping from the pain emanating from failed romantic affairs as the motive for suicide.

The findings above are in consensus with some of the findings made by previous researchers on suicide letters and notes by age and sex as discussed in the foregoing discussion above.

2.5 Research Gaps

It has been observed earlier in the literature review section, that the review of the works by other scholars is significant as it provides the opportunity for the current researcher to acquaint him/herself with what has already been established and make evaluation thereof. By reviewing the pre-existing corpus of studies in forensic linguistics/stylistics, the researcher would be able to determine existing gaps, if any exist.

However, studies on suicide letters and notes in Africa are rarely conducted, let alone in Namibia. This is clearly evident in the literature review section as the reviewed literature was mostly on studies conducted elsewhere, other than on the African continent. This is despite the fact that suicide is one of the leading causes of unnatural and preventable deaths in Namibia as well as other parts of Africa. This is in contrast with the interest shown by scholars from other parts of the world, as is evident in the literature review section. It can be very interesting to see forensic linguistic scholars in Africa showing interest and embarking on research on suicide letters and notes.

Namibia was ranked fourth in suicide deaths in Africa in 2019. However, available studies conducted to this date on suicide in the country have mainly focused on suicide from another perspective, i.e. psychological. The forensic linguistics aspect of suicide such as the investigation of suicide letters and notes alleged to have been authored by the deceased appears to not have been attempted. From a forensic linguistics perspective, authenticity of evidence is key. Within the Namibian context, the unavailability of research conducted on suicide letters and notes was therefore identified as the major research gap.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

An appropriate theoretical framework significantly impacts the outcome of a study in that it helps the researcher to select/find the philosophical and conceptual explications that best suits the study. A relevant theory will then guide the researcher accordingly e.g., what methodologies to employ, etc. As a study that investigates the authenticity and genuineness of suicide letters and notes, the Codal Variation Theory by Andrea Nini (2012) was deemed suitable for this study.

The Codal Variation Theory is central to the variations that exist in language in relation to social groups/classes, dialects, and other linguistic features. Hasan and Nini (2012) elucidate the usefulness of the Codal Variation Theory when applied to studies in forensic contexts e.g., forged

documents, conspiracy, perjury, etc. Hasan and Nini further postulate that the Codal Variation theory is concerned with the variation of meaning in relation to social group when the texts considered are produced in a comparable context. Bernstein (1962) asserts that social groups and social classes produce different meanings in similar contexts because of the way they interpret context.

Imam (2019) details how he explored the usefulness of the Codal Variation Theory in forensic linguistics studies when he conducted a study on the evaluation of the linguistic aspects of Turnitin, a plagiarism detection software. The study specifically evaluated the linguistic aspects covered by this software from a linguistic perspective. The study was able to establish various demerits of the software from a linguistic perspective in its quest to detect plagiarism e.g. its ineffectiveness to distinguish between different citation formats and inability to question the writer to provide proof for the claim made about the written work to be their own. However, the study was able to establish that Turnitin is effective in detecting plagiarism when words are in a sequential format or a sequence of words that parallels its database.

As a forensic linguistics study that focused on the analysis of text materials i.e. suicide letters and notes authored by people who came from different ethnic groups and social backgrounds, the Codal Variation Theory provided grounding from which the researcher could conceptualise the principles of forensic linguistics, and to gain an in-depth comprehension of the variations that exist in the usage of language such as **idiolects** and **encoding.** In the context of language usage, **idiolect** can be defined as the uniqueness in the use of certain lexical items by people from a given ethnic group, or social background e.g. the use of **COZ, U, Y** by young people to communicate or to suit a specific occasion. Another example is manifested through regional variations of the frequent usage of lexical items such as '**southand**' instead of '**thousand**' or '**aks**' instead of '**ask**'. Unwitting usage of a sentence such as '**I use to jog every morning'** instead of '**I jog every morning'** or '**I used to jog every morning'** also falls within the Codal Variation Theory scope as this appears to be common among people of average and low levels of education.

In the same vein, **encoding** is the refashioning of certain lexical items by people from a certain ethnic group, background or age group for some reason e.g. to hide their real intentions. Certain lexical items in a language could be purposely coded to misguide unintended readers or listeners e.g. the following lexical items could be coded as follows: **May=Yam, go=og, up=pu, new=wen**. This coding could only be decoded and understood by people associated with a certain circle of people, or group

e.g. students from the Southern part of the country having a conversation among students from the Eastern part of the country.

This chapter focused on two areas of the study i.e. literature review and theoretical framework. The literature review section established that prior to this study, significant amount of work had already been done on suicide letters and notes by other researchers across the globe. However, this section arrived at a conclusion that none such work has been conducted in Namibia to date. The last section of the chapter looked at the theoretical framework that would guide the study in terms of the relevant theory. As a forensic study, the Codal Variation Theory was justified and rationalised as the most relevant in that it provides grounding for the researcher on various facets of forensic linguistics.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods and procedures considered relevant in addressing the objectives of the study. As stated earlier, the study aimed to conduct an analysis of the linguistic features of purported suicide letters and suicide notes to establish the veracity their authenticity and genuineness, and the outcome of an in-depth analysis conducted determined whether such letters and notes were indeed authored by the deceased themselves or by imposters.

3.2 Research Design

The study explored the language of suicide letters and notes to establish the authors' experiences prior to the alleged suicide acts, thereby determining authenticity and genuineness. As the study sought to explore the linguistic features of sensitive materials in the form of suicide letters and notes, the exploratory research design was viewed relevant for the study as it is flexible and can address questions of all types in discovering new knowledge. To address its objectives fully, the study sought answers to sensitive questions such as the relationship between the authors and the addressee/s, reason/s for the suicide act, etcetera.

3.3 Research Paradigm

Phenomenon are viewed from different philosophical viewpoints. Such philosophical viewpoints are shaped, or can be ascribed to different backgrounds, beliefs and level of education. The study was guided by the interpretivist research paradigm which, according to Alharthi and Rehman (2016), is based on multiple knowledge and realities that are socially constructed and not discovered. Furthermore, it believes that reality and knowledge are subjective i.e. people differ in their perceptions or view and interpret phenomenon from different perspectives. In the context of this study, it is believed that the state of mind, social background, experiences and perception of the phenomenon by an individual prior to the act of self-killing significantly shapes and influences the linguistic features, and the wording of a suicide letter or note.

3.4 Research Approach

The study adopted the qualitative research approach. ''Qualitative research is the systematic collection, organisation and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or conversation. It is employed in the exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves, in their natural contexts'' (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). The implication is that the researcher

can engage or study respondents in their natural settings or environments firsthand, thus guaranteeing the validity of the data collected. Craig et. al., (2007) assert that qualitative research methods allow the researcher an opportunity to engage and interact with the participants, directly or indirectly, thereby eliciting data and exploring their experiences from their own perspectives e.g., by interviewing the participants about their experiences, conducting textual analysis of first-hand documents such as personal diaries, etc. Interviewing respondents and textual analysis of materials can yield first-hand information, thus validating the collected data.

The study involved a textual analysis of linguistic features of purported suicide letters and notes (written texts) from a forensic stylistics/linguistics perspective. By conducting a textual analysis of the suicide letters and suicide notes, the researcher had an opportunity to gain insight into the deceased's experiences prior to their death, the mental states of mind that had an influence on the linguistic features of the suicide letters and suicide notes. This corroborates the argument by Dethlefs and Schoene (2016) who indicate that individuals' experiences can also be manifested through the linguistic features used in communication.

3.5 Research Setting

This study was conducted in two Northern Namibian regions, namely: Oshikoto and Oshana. In Oshana region, one police station was selected for the collection of data, i.e. Oshakati Police Station, whereas in Oshikoto region, two Police stations were selected, i.e. Omuthiya and Oshivelo Police Stations. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, permission to conduct the study had to be sought from the highest office of the Namibian Police Force, the Inspector General. The two regions were selected for the study because of the reason that these regions are two of the regions in Northern Namibia in which suicide deaths have become highly prevalent in recent years.

3.6 Study Population

The study population was all purported suicide letters and notes collected between 2021 and 2022 at the three Police CIUs. During this period i.e. between 2021 and 2022, a total of 74 alleged suicide cases were recorded at Oshakati Police station CIU in Oshana region. At Omuthiya Police station CIU in Oshikoto region, 14 purported suicide cases were recorded, whereas at Oshivelo Police station CIU, 10 cases were recorded. Out of this total number (98), only 12 cases were reported to have been accompanied by letters/notes. Due to this relatively small number, discretion guided the researcher in determining the sample size.

3.7 Sample Size

Due to the fact that only a few alleged suicide deaths are accompanied by suicide letters and notes as indicated above, the researcher purposefully considered all twelve purported suicide letters and notes for analysis. Below is a simple breakdown of the suicide letters and notes as obtained from the CIUs at the three Police stations:

- **Oshikoto Region**

Police Stations/CIU: Omuthiya   3 suicide letters and 3 suicide notes

                Oshivelo   1 suicide letter

            Total   *7 suicide letters/notes*

- **Oshana Region**

Police Station/CIU: Oshakati   3 suicide letters and 2 suicide notes

            Total   *5 suicide letters/notes*

3.8 Sampling Procedures

The researcher employed the purposive sampling method to determine the sample. Ames et. al., (2019) assert that purposive sampling works very well in qualitative studies in managing the amount of data collected. Considering the number of the alleged suicide deaths accompanied by suicide letters and notes in the two regions, and on the basis of convenience, the study rather opted for a different and unusual approach in determining the number to be considered for analysis to ensure depth and reliability in the study. In this case, the sample is purposefully equivalent to the study population which is, under normal circumstances, unusual.

3.9 Research Instruments

A content analysis checklist was adopted as the main research instrument for the study. The checklist consisted of three sections which were laid out according to the objectives of the study. All questions were closed-ended. A notebook was also used to take notes on important information shared by the investigation officers at three CIUs.

3.10 Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed and interpreted at the three linguistic levels as per the objectives of the study i.e. lexical, syntactic and discoursal. At the lexical level, the data were analysed by catergorising the lexical items into positive and negative. At the syntactic level, the data were analysed by establishing the general usage of language by the authors i.e. the use of punctuation, paragraphing, grammar use, between men and women, young and elder authors. Finally, at the discoursal level, the data were analysed by determining the general discourses of the suicide messages i.e. motive for committing suicide, the relationship between the author and addressee/s and the authors' status in their communities were established.

3.11 Validity and Reliability

Cresswell et. al., (2007) suggest eight strategies for validity in research. These are: prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, refining hypotheses as the inquiry advances, clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study, the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations, rich and thick description and external audits. However, Cresswell et al. (2007) clarify that despite the impracticality of all these strategies to be employed in a single study, it is imperative and advisable that the researcher employs at least two in a single study.

To ensure that the study reflects validity and reliability, the researcher employed only one of the strategies propounded by Cresswell et al. (2007) during the study i.e. peer review or debriefing. During the study, the researcher was under the guidance and supervision of an Academic Professor (supervisor) and one Academic Doctor (co-supervisor) who are highly competent in the field. The two academics provided guidance and support during the study on the appropriateness of the instrument to this study.

3.12 Ethical Consideration

Research ethics and standards require the collected data to reflect honesty and integrity. As the study was conducted on sensitive materials, information was handled with utmost confidentiality from the researcher's point of view. The police are usually the first respondent to incidences of alleged suicide cases, and inevitably responsible for collecting any piece of evidence pertaining to such deaths (such as suicide letters and notes), as well as other materials that may have been used in the act of committing the alleged suicide. Upon collecting such materials, the police ensure that such materials are critically investigated and verified. This verification is critical as it establishes authenticity and genuineness, or reveals any kinds of manipulation or foul play.

Suicide letters and notes are sensitive text materials left behind by people who are purported to have committed suicide. Because of this, they are treated with utmost confidentiality as per the regulations set by the Namibian Police Force. As such, suicide letters and notes are not readily available to the public. For the purpose of this study, permission was first sought from the highest office of the Namibian Police Force, the Inspector General, to conduct research on these texts/materials. The study was conducted with the aim of gaining an understanding of the content and the linguistic features of the suicide letters and notes in order to determine their authenticity and genuineness.

The researcher ensured that confidentiality and sensitivity on the text materials was observed by adhering to the following during the analysis:

- No digital equipment (including cellphones) was to be used during the analysis.
- While analysing the texts, the authors of suicide letters and suicide notes remained anonymous and all names were coded.
- The analysis was conducted in the presence of the head of the CIU of the respective police stations.

Finally, the researcher ensured that the study reflected academic honesty and integrity. This was done by conducting the study in line with the university's guidelines, ethics and other set standards. All sources used in the study were acknowledged and referenced as per the university's recommended format.

In summary, this chapter presents the research methodology and procedures employed in the study. It employed the exploratory research methodologies and was guided by the research paradigm of Interpretivism. The qualitative research approach was deemed the appropriate one for this study. The study was conducted at one police station in Oshikoto Region and two police stations in Oshana Region and the study population was the suicide letters and notes collected between 2021 and 2022. The sample was all of the suicide letters and notes that were available and were arrived at through the purposive sampling procedure. The research instruments were the content analysis checklist and notebook. The data was analysed in line with the goals of responding to the objectives of the study, whereas the validity and reliability of the study was ensured by having two competent academics as supervisors. Ethically, the study was conducted in line with the ethical requirements set out by both NUST and the Namibia Police Force.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided in two sections, A and B. Section A presents the findings, and section B presents the discussions of the analysis of the linguistic features of suicide letters and notes. The findings were presented in table and paragraph format.

SECTION A.

4.2 Presentation of the findings of the study

Table 4.1 below presents the total number of suicide letters and notes analysed in the two regions:

Region	CIU	Dockets& Suicide Letter/s	Dockets & Suicide Note/s
Oshikoto	**Omuthiya**	three	three
	Oshivelo	one	none
Oshana	**Oshakati**	three	two
Total		**seven**	**Five**

At Omuthiya Police Station CIU, six dockets, in which three contained suicide letters and another three contained suicide notes were available and provided texts for analysis.

Docket 1 contained a one and half page purported suicide letter. The letter appeared to have been authored some time back prior to the purported suicide act as it appeared to have been folded or tucked into a tight space. **Docket 2** contained a two-and-a-half-page purported suicide letter in a form of a diary entry. **Docket 3** contained a half-page handwritten purported suicide note. **Docket 4** contained one sentence of less than twenty words alleged suicide note. **Docket 5** contained a one-page alleged suicide letter. **Docket 6** contained a one-sentence purported suicide note.

At Oshivelo Police Station CIU, **Docket 1**, which was the only one available, contained a one and more than half page purported suicide letter.

At Oshakati Police Station CIU, five dockets in which two contained suicide notes and another three contained suicide letters and were available and were obtained for analysis.

Docket 1 contained a one-page purported suicide letter. **Docket 2** contained a less than ten words alleged suicide note. The statement on the suicide note was accompanied by three ambiguous drawings on a different piece of paper. Though this suicide note was only made up of few words and the three ambiguous drawings, the message it delivered could be deciphered during the analysis. **Docket 3** contained a two-sentence alleged suicide note which was sent through a short message service (SMS). **Docket 4** contained a seven-page purported suicide letter. On the suicide letter, two cut-out letters from a local weekly newspaper were pasted. The content of the two letters appeared to be highlighting specific realities in life. **Docket 5** contained a two-page purported suicide letters.

4.3 Determining the Authenticity of Suicide Letters and Notes Following a Lexical Forensic Analysis

Each suicide letter and note was analysed at the lexical level to ascertain its authenticity i.e. by examining the lexical items that the purported suicides chose to express the psychodynamics behind their suicide acts and other emotions that may have led to the suicide. Upon a critical analysis of the lexical features of the alleged suicide letters and notes, the analysis established that purported suicides depicted two sets of minds before the act i.e. happiness and unhappiness/anger through the usage of lexical items denoting positive and negative thinking towards the self and others (addressee/s).

Table 4.32 below presents lexical items (parts of speech) denoting positive emotions in suicide letters and notes:

Part of speech Author	Verb	Noun	Adverb	Adjective
Young	Safe	freedom		Careful
Old	Safe	eternity		peaceful
Male	Safe	flower		
Female	Safe	flower, love, eternity		caring, peaceful, safe

Although suicide is a phenomenon that leaves other people distraught, it can be observed from the use of positive lexical items in the alleged suicide messages that good relationships existed between purported suicides and the addressees. Such positive lexical items are henceforth crucial in the authentication of suicide letters and notes.

Apart from the lexical items presented in the table above, it was believed that 90% of these purported suicide letters and notes were authored by people who may only have received a low level of education as significant incompetency in general language usage were observed in the purported the suicide letters and notes.

It was also established that the formality level of the lexical items that were opted for in many of the suicide letters and notes ranged from average to below average e.g. a lower case 'g' appeared quite often in the writing of the noun 'God' as in 'god' in most, if not all, suicide letters and notes in which God was mentioned. Another noticeable informality observed was the ineptitude in distinguishing between proper nouns from other parts of speech. For example, names of people and places, and days of the week were written using a lower case at the beginning e.g. 'maria', 'tuesday', 'omuntele', etc.

Purported suicides and the addressee/s could be traced to their places of origin through the identification of names of people and places in the suicide letters and notes. Such names are

traditionally and predominantly known to be for places and people from specific regions such as Ohangwena and Omusati in Northern Namibia, which were not regions that the current study was conducted in e.g. Oshikango.

The use of certain letters in some specific lexical items e.g. the letter 'H' in the place of the letter 'A' was also crucial in the tracing of the authors to the areas they originated from. For_instance, the letter 'H' is mostly used in lexical items and names of people who mainly hail from Ohangwena and Kavango regions, and some parts of Southern Angola. Names and lexical items in which the letter 'H' has been used can therefore point to purported suicide letters/notes as having been authored by suicides from these regions, rather than by suicides who hailed from the other regions of Namibia.

Finally, habitual inconsistency in the usage of the first person singular 'I' was also observed. A lower case 'i' appeared quite frequently in lieu of the correct first-person singular version, the capital letter 'I', throughout the content of the alleged suicide letters and notes authored by both male and female authors. Also observed in the suicide letters and notes were the authors' incompetency (both male and female), in the use of a capital letter at the beginning of sentences.

4.4 Describing the Authors of Suicide Letters and Notes in Line with a Syntactic Forensic Framework

Each suicide letter and note was also analysed at the syntactic level to determine its author, in the process, establishing its genuineness and authenticity. Under this subheading, focus was put on the authors' usage of language i.e. general language usage e.g. sentence construction, spelling, concord, paragraphing, language use differences between young and older/elderly authors as well as language use differences between men and women.

Generally, the investigation established that about 58% of the authors were incompetent in grammatically correct writing, as the alleged suicide letters and notes reflected numerous flaws in grammar. Under the previous subheading, it was observed that the majority of the authors have not attained formal education at a higher level. The content analysis at the syntactic level substantiates this claim as the discourses of suicide messages also reflected flaws in grammar e.g. the construction of sentences, concord, paragraphing by most of the authors and other ineptitudes related to basic language usage.

Below is a short description of each author in relation to general language/grammar (writing) usage:

- Author 1. (suicide letter): flaws in concord, punctuations, spelling, sentences longer & upper case

- Author 2. (suicide letter): concord, paragraphing & punctuations
- Author 3. (suicide note): concord, spelling & punctuations
- Author 4. (suicide note): clustering of words, sentences longer, spelling, punctuations & upper case
- Author 5. (suicide letter): concord, paragraphing, sentences longer & upper case
- Author 6. (suicide note): clustering of words, concord, punctuations, spelling & upper case
- Author 7: (suicide letter): paragraphing, punctuations & concord
- Author 8. (suicide letter): concord, spelling & upper case
- Author 9. (suicide note): punctuations, concord & spelling
- Author 10. (suicide note): no flaws in language use observed
- Author 11. (suicide letter): spelling, concord, sentences longer, punctuations & upper case
- Author 12. (suicide letter): punctuations, concord, spelling & upper case

With the exception of one of the authors, it can be observed above that all the other suicide letters and notes evince incompetence in writing. For example, in most cases, the authors used sentences of relatively longer and ambiguous length, whereas in some cases, the subject of the sentence does not agree with the verb. The use of punctuation marks was inconsistent. and in some instances, there was no use of punctuation marks at all. In some cases, words appeared to have been clustered together instead of being written on their individually. Despite such relatively longer and ambiguous sentence length, the message was however clear and the meaning could be deduced.

Differences between suicide letters and notes authored by purported young and older/elderly authors were also noted. Elderly authors tended to author suicide notes instead of suicide letters as compared to young authors. Young authors appeared to have preferred suicide letters. Elderly suicides tended to cluster words together. Another difference noted was that elder suicides also appeared to be direct and explicit in writing, whereas young suicides, in some instances, appeared ambiguous, mentally challenged or possessed by certain external forces. In some cases, the message could only be decoded when it was critically analysed.

The analysis further established that suicide letters and notes authored by men and women alike, differed in terms of language use. Suicide letters and notes authored by women featured lexical items that bear feminist characteristics i.e. emotional and compassionate in nature. It expressed love and care towards the authors themselves and for the addressee/s. Also, the authors committed suicide, instances from the texts depicted expression of softheartedness and compassion. Such is typical of the nature of women.

On the contrary, men differed from women as they reflected their masculinity in the way they used language. Male authors used language that lacked compassion and kindness. The content featured phrases reflecting aggression and issuing of directives to the addressee/s or certain members of the family e.g. what should be inherited and by who, who should take custody of the deceased's children, reading of eulogy, rites to be performed at burial, who shouldn't mourn their passing, etc.

Table 4.3 below presents phrases demonstrating language use by men and women as evinced in the suicide letters and notes

Phrases	Affection/care (women)	Sympathy (women)	Aggression (men)
	*I love you

* my flower

*goodbye mother and father | * do not be afraid

*have faith

*been good to me

*be blessed

*meet in eternity

*appreciate you | *silent assassin

*hell you

*curse upon you

*shall see

*despicable |

Such textual evidence above reveals that women tend to use emotive language in their dying declarations. Men on the other hand are unemotional toward others and are preoccupied by negativity and hatred towards those they blame for the decision they made to commit suicide. With such evidence at hand, conclusions can be drawn with regards to the authenticity of the suicide letters and notes as they featured traits naturally associated with each gender.

4.5 Evaluating the genuineness of suicide letters and notes through a discoursal forensic perspective

Determining the genuineness of the letters and notes alleged to be suicide messages collected from, and around scenes of unnatural deaths, or which may have been stashed in the pockets of the deceased, pillows, shoes or elsewhere is significant as it can provide much needed forensic evidence when a suicide death appears suspicious. As contemplated in terms of the Computer Evidence Act of 1985, critical investigation of alleged suicide messages has the potential to yield valuable forensic evidence critical to solving questions related to the actual cause of death. Focus under this objective was central to the discourses of the alleged suicide letters and notes.

The analysis of the discourses of the alleged suicide letters and notes established the following:

- inheritor/s' name/s'
- contact numbers of the addressee/s
- places to visit for more information
- name/s of people to answer questions for the suicide act
- names of people to perform certain rituals e.g. at burials, etc.
- people to be contacted for more information
- investments e.g. money, etc.

The investigation established that the content of about 97% of the purported suicide letters and notes' made reference to other people (the addressee/s). Such people were either close relatives, spouses or certain people in the communities the deceased lived. Specifically, the authors stated the name/s of such people in the content. The authors also signed off the message at the end of the alleged suicide letters/notes with phrases such as 'good bye', 'meeting in eternity', 'time has arrived', 'going home', etc.

Apart from the discovery of the critical evidence above, it was also noted in the messages, the deceased also provided reasons why they took their own lives. For instances, some deceased persons made reference to the abuses and humiliation that they suffered at the hands of their relatives as the motive to commit suicide, whereas others indicated threats, frustration, betrayal and curses allegedly cast upon them by people they were involved with in romantic relationships, to be the motive for the suicide act.

Such textual evidence establishes that the physical and psychological strain experienced by the deceased prior to the alleged suicide acts culminated in the mental incapacitation to deal with the physical and spiritual world, and attendant experiences. The mental and physical exertions led to despair and hopelessness in life. Some of the deceased expressed hatred and dissent, or avenged by wishing the addressee/s bad luck in life for subjecting them to abuse, humiliation, threat, physical and mental torture. Besides the hatred and dissent, purported suicides, particularly the women, also expressed love and compassion towards the addressee/s. It can be deduced from the language in the messages of the alleged suicide letters and notes that such discourses revolved around issues related to humanity and the wellbeing of deceased.

The following are the discourses of some of the alleged suicide letters and notes investigated:

In one of the **suicide notes**, the author narrated how a daughter had been abusing her both physically and psychologically for some time to the extent that she could not take it any longer. She contemplated that self-killing was the only way out of such humiliation. In another alleged **suicide note**, the author narrated about demonic spirits that kept haunting him for quite some time as the reason for committing suicide. He also narrated how these demonic spirits could start haunting his family members too, if they do not act promptly and accordingly. Another author of another purported **suicide note** narrated how she was frustrated by life and became hopeless as a result of having been unemployed for a long time despite the potential in her.

In one of the alleged **suicide letters**, the author detailed at length how he was deliberately infected with an incurable disease by a woman he was involved in a romantic relationship with. He narrated how he resented both her and her mother, and went to the extent of issuing directives regarding them. Another suicide narrated in the purported **suicide letter** how he feared going to jail for alleged gender-based violence. The author of another alleged **suicide letter** detailed what had to be done for his children after his death. He also issued directives regarding the distribution of his belongings (inheritance).

The narratives above indicate how the deceased and the addressee/s may have been related to each other before their death e.g. a man addressing his spouse, a woman addressing her daughter, etc. The narratives also established the status of some of the authors with regards to, for example, employment, gender, marital, etc. These two aspects, relationship and status, are both crucial in determining the genuineness of the alleged suicide letters and notes.

4.6 Discussions

In this section, the findings of the study are discussed in a manner that responds to the concerns of the study objectives as established in Chapter 1.

As indicated in Section A, in the Oshikoto Region, the researcher visited the Criminal Investigation Units (CIU) at Oshivelo and Omuthiya police stations, whereas in the Oshana region, the researcher visited the CIU at Oshakati Police Station to collect data. A criminal investigation unit is a unit/division in a police station that investigates crimes committed in areas designated for its operations. By virtue of being an investigation unit/division, the investigation of suicide deaths, suspicious suicide deaths, or attempted suicide cases falls under this division/unit.

Section 3 of the Inquests Act of the Republic of Namibia stipulates that, ''any member of the police who has reason to believe that a person has died an unnatural death, shall –

(a) investigate or cause to be investigated the circumstances of the death or alleged death; and

(b) report or cause to be reported the death or alleged death to the magistrate of the district concerned, or to a person designated by the magistrate.''

As section 3 (a) of the Act contemplates, the investigation of unnatural deaths, including suicide or attempted suicide, can be conducted by any member of the police force. However, the CIU is specifically mandated to investigate all cases of unnatural deaths. Inevitably, the investigation of alleged suicide letters and notes collected from, or around scenes of purported suicide deaths is conducted by investigation officials from this particular unit/division.

Although it has been indicated earlier that by law, suicide and attempted suicide are not considered crimes in Namibia, of which the implication is that the two cannot be investigated under the Namibian law. However, as with other cases of unnatural deaths, critical investigations of the two is significant for the preservation of justice in Namibia. Joh and Lee (2019) assert that the analysis of suicide letters and notes from a forensic linguistics perspective is significant in that it does not only shed light into the minds of the deceased persons before the suicide, but such can also provide reliable evidence in case of suspicious suicide cases. Bethard et. al. (2015) posit that Authorship Attribution helps in the identification of the actual author of a text or document.

Despite the high number of suspected suicide/suicide incidences reported every year in the two regions, records at the three CIUs indicate that it is only a few purported suicide deaths that are accompanied by letters and notes, which are claimed to have been authored by the deceased. In Section A, a table was used to present the number of alleged suicide letters and notes collected from scenes of/around scenes of suspected suicide deaths by investigating officers from the three CIUs visited between 2021 and 2022. During the course of the study, records provided at Omuthiya police station CIU indicate that out of 14 suspected suicide cases recorded during that period, it was only four of such deaths that were accompanied by alleged suicide letters and notes. This roughly translates into less than 22% of alleged suicide deaths that were accompanied by suicide messages in that area during that period. On the contrary, Murty (2015) submits that it is between 25% and 30% of suicide deaths that are accompanied by suicide letters and notes.

Based on the findings, and the number of purported suicide letters and notes that were collected by investigating officers from the other two police CIUs: Oshivelo and Omuthiya, a statistical difference was noted in terms of the number of purported suicide letters and notes left behind by alleged suicides in the two regions.

Such findings show that the writing of suicide letters and notes is a global phenomenon. However, putting into perspective the findings made by this study, suicide letters and notes are not common in the two Northern parts of the country in comparison to other parts of the world as demonstrated in the literature section. This was also substantiated by investigation officials at the three CIUs who respond, as indicated earlier, to purported suicide incidence calls at their respective CIUs in the two regions.

However, it should also be noted that conclusions should not merely be drawn on such basis as advances in technology and popular social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. today could also be chosen platforms to communicate suicide messages. Such messages may only be shared with certain individuals and can be hidden from investigating officers from the police CIUs for some reason. One instance of such is **Docket 3** which was obtained from one of the three police stations' CIU, which contained a suicide note, authored by the alleged suicide and sent through a short message service (SMS).

The study noted that pen and paper was the most preferred medium to write suicide messages. Interestingly, the reviewed literature has also indicated that pen and paper was the most common medium. However, Tarranum et. al. (2015) discover that in some rather peculiar circumstances, suicidal persons opt for unconventional surfaces such as bed sheet or their own body parts. The implication here is that, although modern technology and other surfaces could be used as platforms to author suicide letters and notes nowadays, the pen and paper remains the most common platform in most parts of the world, including the two Northern parts of Namibia, as evidenced by the reviewed literature and the examination of the alleged suicide letters and notes obtained for analysis in this study.

4.6.1 Determining the authenticity of suicide letters and notes following a lexical forensic framework

As stated earlier, the initial task was to subject each suicide letter and note to a critical analysis of its lexical content to ascertain if such content was indeed authored by the deceased person prior to the alleged suicide act. In the same breadth, the analysis also sought to establish if the purported suicide letter or notes were fraudulent acts to disguise and mislead, thereby obstructing the ends of justice.

An in-depth analysis of each suicide letter and note evinced that approximately 80% of the lexical items in each suicide letter and note analysed reflected similarity e.g. in every suicide letter and note, there were lexical items which expressed anger, anxiety, hatred, curse, affection, love,

kindness or compassion towards the addressee/s. The use of lexical items reflecting negativity is an indication that prior to the alleged suicide act, the deceased people may have been agitated and psychologically unsettled for an unspecified period of time. The use of lexical items depicting positive emotions expresses affection and kindness towards both the self and addressee/s.

From a forensic stylistics/linguistics point of view, the presence of parts of speech/words reflecting positive and negative attitude in suicide letters or suicide notes may be viewed as an indication that the deceased people may have been going through (for some period) troubled lives, or may have been suffering from illnesses of some kind, and yet at the same time were appreciative of their loved ones for some reason as expressed in the affection, kindness and compassion expressed through the use of positive words in the message they allegedly left behind. The use of both positive and negative lexical items matches the psychological states and conditions human beings usually express when hurt, agitated or burdened. Such lexical items are evidence that the letters and notes are indeed authentic, as opposed to having been fabricated by other people in an attempt to mislead the investigators.

When critically analysed from a psychological perspective, negative parts of speech such as 'infected' and 'disease' as shown in the findings, can be assumed to reflect that people who were intentionally infected with a deadly virus/disease by those involved in romantic relationships with, as claimed by some of the authors, may not have been at peace, thus the decision to end their lives. One may decide to cut his/her life short to avoid prolonged sickness, and a slow and painful death. Thus, from a forensic linguistics perspective, there appears to be a match between the negative parts of speech used by the alleged suicides and the decisions they made to end their lives (suicide). This claim can substantiate or can be a basis to make the conclusion that a suicide letter or note has indeed been authored by the deceased person prior to the suicide act (that it is authentic).

Other lexical items can also substantiate the comments made above for authenticity. For example, a critical analysis of the part of speech 'cursed' in a suicide message was also made to determine authenticity of the suicide message. A curse can be defined as some kind of extraordinary powers, which many people associate with magic, evil spirits and misfortunes. When such powers are cast upon a person, such a person may start or keep experiencing a series of misfortunes or bad luck in life. Therefore, a person who believes a curse has been cast upon him or her by some evil forces may become both mentally and physically disorientated. As a result, such a person may become both mentally and physically incapacitated to continue leading a normal life. He or she may ultimately decide to take his/her own life to ease the perpetual suffering that he or she has been battling with for long.

In one such instance, a purported suicide claimed a 'curse' or being possessed by evil spirits as the motive for the suicide. This claim could not be disputed or said to be a fabrication by another person as the analysis of the lexical items uncovered that the author claimed to have been battling paranormal experiences that led to the impairment of his thoughts and emotions several times. The appearance of strange and unusual visuals in motion, and hearing of voices from spiritualistic mediums were also indicated in that alleged suicide message. Unusual drawings that accompanied the suicide message (which could not be interpreted) revealed critical information in the attempts to comprehend the psychodynamics of the purported author of this suicide message. If the claims made in the suicide message match the behavior displayed by the deceased around the period of death, then such message can indeed be said to be authentic.

In another similar case, the alleged author claimed to have been battling a curse which had been cast upon him by enemies and naysayers in the neighborhoods for some years. This purported suicide message can also be said to be an act of the deceased person as he indicated that some neighbours (whose names he provided in the suicide message) were behind the decision he made. In this case, if such names match those of the alleged neighbours as indicated in the message, then such a suicide message can indeed be said to be authentic as it is easy to verify the information furnished in the suicide message with people who were close to the deceased. The author also indicated that he tried seeking for divine intervention (pastor's name provided) as well as traditional healers on several occasions, but this did not yield any relief.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, the word 'cursed' and the subsequent provision of names (which match the names of people referred to in the suicide messages) are evidence enough to assume that such suicide messages were indeed authored by the deceased people. This could also be verified by contacting people whose names were provided in the alleged suicide messages. This can also be verified through information that can be obtained from relatives, close friends and neighbours about the suicide's behaviour and conducts during the period preceding the purported suicide act.

Similarly, previous scholars have also revealed how suicides from other parts of the world vented out anger and frustration by using strong language in the suicide messages they left. Similarities in the choice of words (negative) used by the alleged authors of suicide messages analysed, and those in studies conducted by other researchers were noted. Fitri and Sudjana (2013) conduct an analysis of the lexical items in Kurt Cobian's suicide note. The analysis established the use of different negative words and phrases such as burning, can't get over frustration, moody, too much of an erratic, coward, finished, etc. Buschmann et. al. (2017) reveal the use of negative words and phrases in the

suicide messages such as fuck life, silly mistakes, inner pain, etc. Such vocabulary and phrases in suicide messages are indicative of a fact that prior to a suicide act, an individual goes through a period of inner pain and suffering such as depression and sickness, and as such, this can be evidence that indeed a suicide letter or note has not been fabricated to deceive, but authentic.

As noted before, the analysis did not only establish expressions of agitation and hopelessness, but also a sense of care and humanity through the usage of lexical items/vocabulary denoting inherent affection and sympathy towards the addressee/s. Vocabulary such as 'love', 'flower', 'appreciate' and 'blessed' have been observed in alleged suicide letters and notes during the analysis. Alfian (2018) notes the use of positive lexical items and phrases such as lovely people, greatest father, sacrifice, thank you, your efforts and love you in suicide letters and notes. Such similarities in the language choices by authors indicates a universal mindset towards the addressees.

Generally, from a forensic stylistics/linguistics point of view, a match between the choice of parts of speech and lexical items (negative) present in the suicide letters and notes, and the behaviour/mental state displayed by the deceased persons alleged to have committed suicide, is an indication that such messages are indeed genuine and authentic. In regards to the presence of positive parts of speech in suicide messages, it is common knowledge that naturally, there exists strong bonds and mutual affection between loved ones and friends. Such bonds and affection may remain eternal, and could also be manifested in dying declarations such as suicide messages and wills.

As indicated earlier, the findings of this study established that some suicides made drawings and symbols in the suicide messages. Such could have been intended to add certain effects to the written messages. However, it was noted that the drawing of symbols on the suicide letters and notes occurs seldomly. Buschmann et. al. (2017) discover the writing of a rebus by a suicide. A rebus is a form of writing in which words are represented by a combination of pictures or symbols and individual letters. Unlike the unusual drawings on the suicide message, the meaning of the symbols on the rebus could be interpreted as the author used usual symbols.

Drawings and symbols accounted for only about 2% of the suicide message investigated by other researchers, whereas this study established that the drawing of symbols only accounted for about 1% of the suicide messages analysed. The implication therefore is that drawings and symbols are not common in suicide messages in the two regions.

In the findings, the drawing of unusual symbols (for which meaning could not be established) was found to have only been present in suicide messages authored by individuals who claimed to have

been possessed by paranormal forces. In this regard, it can be implied that the state of being (both physical and psychological) of the deceased is in correspondence with the unusual drawings made on the suicide messages. From a Forensic linguistics perspective, such a suicide message can be considered authentic. This is so because mentally challenged people often display unusual behaviour, and in this case, resulting in the drawing of unusual symbols and cartoons which are difficult to interpret.

Another feature that stood out in determining the authenticity of the suicide messages was the use of lexical items traditionally and predominantly known to be used by people from specific areas or regions, or known to belong to a specific social group. Such lexical items significantly help in the tracing of the authors to specific areas of origin, or social group. An example evinced in the findings was the use of the letter 'H' in some lexical items that certain alleged authors have used in the suicide messages. The letter 'H' was mostly preferred (In such instances as in the writing of names) in place of the letter 'A'. As indicated earlier, the use of letter 'H' can be evidence to assume the place or area where the alleged author hailed from.

For example, letter 'H' is traditionally known to be used in some words and names of people predominantly inhabiting many areas in Ohangwena region and parts of the Kavango region in Northern Namibia. This letter is used in the place of letter 'A' e.g. the name **H**angula can be **A**ngula in other dialects spoken in areas in Northern Namibia. It is also used by some people who inhabit some parts of southern Angola and as such, the use of letter 'H' in the place of 'A' can be traced to people from these areas. Although the free movement of people from one region/place to another today may dispute this claim, it can still be argued (from a forensic linguistics point of view) that the suicide message is authentic when the words/names used match the dialect used the deceased and the place or region that he or she hailed from.

The standard of language and specific lexical items and phrases used in the suicide letters and notes are critical in determining the place/region/ country the author hailed from, thereby determining the authenticity of the suicide message. In this study, the authors' places or regions of origin could be established, as is indicated above, through the identification of the usage of certain letters in the construction of names used in the suicide messages. Tracing the origin of the authors of suicide letters or notes is significant in establishing the authenticity of the suicide letters and notes. Similarly, Buschmann et. al. (2017) establish the use of German, Arabic and English which could also be helpful in determining which countries the author hailed from.

The literature review section shows conformity and accuracy in the usage of language in the suicide letters and notes. On the contrary, such was not the case in the suicide messages investigated or this study as the language was characterised by numerous grammatical errors.

4.6.2 Describing the authors of suicide letters and notes in line with a syntactic forensic framework

Secondly, the analysis was premised on the description of the alleged authors in relation to the syntactic make-up of the suicide letters and notes. Each suicide letter and note was, as such, analysed at this level to determine its authenticity and genuineness. Specifically, the analysis examined how the authors generally used language in the alleged suicide letters and notes to determine authenticity and genuineness i.e. structure of the sentences used, concord, the use of punctuation marks and paragraphing, language use by men and women as well as by young/youth and elders/elderly people. It should be noted that due to sensitivity and ethical grounds, personal information (used in the alleged suicide messages investigated) such as authors' names, villages/towns or regions they hailed from, contact numbers, dates of birth, etc. are withheld in this paper.

Generally, incompetency in the general usage of language e.g. grammar, paragraphing, sentence construction and punctuation marks can be associated with the lack of adequate formal education, or low levels of formal education, as well as old age. For instance, the formation of sentences that stretched up to four or five lines on a page, not knowing where to use upper and lower cases in a given sentence, differentiating proper nouns from other nouns, clustering of words together in sentences and inconsistency in the use of, or no use of punctuation marks at all, are an indication that the author may only have attained elementary education. Such could also be due to old age and poor health.

The three aspects, level of education, old age and poor health, are some of the useful tools in forensic linguistics in determining the authenticity of suspicious documents, which include alleged suicide letters and notes, thereby providing answers to questions pertaining to disputed cases related to forgery and falsification of written documents. Another instance in this regard is the clustering of words together in sentences. The clustering of words together can be attributed to old age as has been established earlier in the findings. It can also be attributed to low levels of education. Since suicide notes authored by elders/elderly people were characterised by clustered words, it can thus be assumed that such notes are indeed genuine and authentic. On the contrary, Coulthard (2019) propounds the notion of idiolect and uniqueness of encoding. Here the emphasis is on the ability possessed by individual humans to use language distinctively.

Clumsy and sloppy writing match the three aspects: old age, poor health and poor education. Old people are naturally sloppy, fragile and clumsy due to old age or poor health, whereas people with low levels of education may generally lack basic writing competence. From a forensic linguistics viewpoint, the suicide messages can therefore be argued to be authentic.

A second observation made in the suicide notes authored by older/elderly people, which is significant in determining authenticity was the purported suicide message being too short and explicit. This may as well be attributed to old age and poor health. A short and direct message matches the physical and mental state of an elderly author, and as asserted before, older/elderly people are naturally mentally unfit and physically inactive as compared to young people (who are at the peak of fitness, both mentally and physically) to process and piece together pieces of writing that would take up more time and energy. Chiu, Halliday, Ho and Yip (1998) conduct a study between young and elderly people. The results showed that suicide messages authored by young people were longer, with the content indicating emotional state of mind. The results also showed that suicide messages authored by elderly people were short (suicide notes).

As such, alleged suicide messages featuring the two traits stated above, message being short and direct, can be said to be authentic from a forensic linguistics perspective as such traits fit in well with the natural features of elderly people.

Another observation made during the investigation which is of great significance in proving authenticity was the differences observed between suicide letters and notes authored by men and women. The analysis notes that suicide letters and notes alleged to have been authored by women are emotional and sympathetic towards both the self and the addressee/s, whereas those purported to have been authored by men contain strong and unsympathetic language towards the addressee/s. Naturally, women tend to be caring, embracing, sympathetic and compassionate towards the self and others. Lester (2009) asserts that men tend to leave suicide messages that are characterised by internal anger in comparison to suicide messages left by women.

In addition, men are physical, uncompromising and intolerant by nature. Apart from such attributes manifested in the general conduct and behaviour of men, such may also be manifested in writing. From a forensic stylistics/linguistics perspective, the analysis assumes that such suicide letters and notes are authentic as their contents reflect/match the traits and features that are naturally associated with the two respective genders.

To substantiate the claim made above, men tend to use language that reflects anger, aggression and issue directives more than women do in general. In one instance in the analysis, the purported author

made a declaration and provided directives that had to be complied with by certain people. Such a declaration included the distribution of his wealth such as cattle (address where such could be found provided), house and car among others, custody for the children and rituals to be performed. A warning was also given as to what might befall upon those who failed to comply with the directives. However, prior research reviewed established that instructions in the suicide letters and notes are not associated with age or gender. Lester (2009) further establishes that there was a tendency for more suicide messages by men and such notes included instructions to those left behind and a mention of financial difficulties.

In suicide messages purported to have been authored by women, expressions such as 'I love you', 'take care' and 'goodbye' were observed. Such expressions are indicative of softheartedness and kindness of the nature of women in general. As such, from a forensic linguistics point of view, a suicide letter or note alleged to have been authored by a woman and containing such phrases can be assumed to be authentic as such features and attributes of language are typical of, or match those associated with femininity. In contrast, Lenaars et. al. (1989) submit that women write suicide messages that have words depicting depression, self-hostility, confusion and sadness caused by the death of relatives.

The last feature observed that was also remarkable in determining authenticity was the penning of longer suicide letters. As indicated in the findings, young authors preferred writing suicide letters more than suicide notes, unlike elder/elderly authors. It can be noted that an alleged author that has penned a seven-page suicide letter gives the impression that he/she had carefully planned the suicide act. This implies that the author had ample time to carefully ponder on the content of such suicide message, or had carefully planned his/her own death. It is common knowledge that young people, unlike elder/elderly people, are energetic from both mental and physical points of view. Young people are likely to be burdened more mentally and physically or influenced by peer pressure in comparison to elder/elderly people. This could be the reason why they tend to pen longer suicide letters.

However, Lester and Reeve (1982) observe that age is not associated with the length of the suicide message, the message being disorganised, the number of positive and negative words or the number of the number of suicide messages authored. However, the evidence gathered from this study i.e. preference of suicide letters by young people and suicide notes by elderly people can be a good basis for assumptions regarding their authenticity and genuineness from a forensic linguistics perspective as it can also be scientifically proven that physical and mental acuity in human beings decline with old age.

In this study, it was noted that older authors of suicide notes used language that expressed their feelings and emotions. For instance, they cite their unhappiness about the treatment they received from those they expected to take care of them. Foster (2003) establishes that older suicides expressed fewer feelings of inadequacy and indicated signs of illness, grief and loneliness as a result of widowhood. In essence, older authors across the globe commonly use language that expresses their concerns such as unhappiness, vulnerability and loneliness. Bauer et. al. (1997) establish that elderly people write both suicide letters and notes in which they reflect ill-health related to old age and lack of care by loved ones.

Another contrast noted during the analysis at the syntactic level was the difference noted in the surfaces opted for by the purported authors to pen down suicide letters and notes. The reviewed literature noted the use of unusual surfaces to pen suicide letters and notes. For example, unusual surfaces such as body parts of suicides themselves and bed sheets were some of the surfaces used for penning suicide messages. In this study, paper was observed as the most common and preferred surface for suicide letters and notes, except on one occasion in which a suicide note was sent via a short message service (SMS).

4.6.3 Evaluating the genuineness of suicide letters and notes through a discoursal forensic perspective

Artinopoulou et. al., (2020) examine the narrative roles in suicide letters and notes. The examination specifically focused on the suicide letters and notes' content. In the findings, it was noted that the investigation examined the discourse of the purported suicide letters and notes in order to ascertain their genuineness. At this level of the analysis, five key elements were critical in determining genuineness. These were: the addressee/s, places, the relationship between the deceased and the addressee/s, motive/s for the alleged suicide and the deceased's status.

References to other people made in the purported suicide letters and notes was critical as it holds much needed probative value in the analysis of these messages for genuineness. The people whose names were mentioned in the purported suicide letters and notes could be traced and contacted for questioning, if there was suspicion with regards to the veracity of the suicide act as the cause of death. In the same way, contact numbers provided in these messages could be called and owners interviewed for the same purpose. Places mentioned (for some reason) could also be visited for investigation and the collection of any other form of evidence, especially in cases of suspicious suicide deaths. Cai et. al. (2020) investigate suicide letters and notes from Shanghai and Wuhan in China focusing on "putting the blame on others in suicide letters and suicide notes". Similarly, the content/discourses in suicide letters and notes investigated during this study evinced how the

authors of suicide letters and notes blame other people for their deaths. When the names provided in the suicide letters or notes match those of people referred to, which is usually the case, there should be no doubt that such suicide messages are genuine. When there is a match of places, there can be no doubt that the message is genuine.

The second feature analysed was the relationship between the author and the addressee/s. When the author has indicated how he/she was related to the addressee/s e.g. by using phrases such as 'my flower', 'my daughter', and the like in a purported dying declaration, it becomes apparent that such a claim could be genuine in that, such claim/s made by the author could also be verified with the person referred to for clarity. For example, if an author of a suicide letter or note wrote, 'my daughter' or 'my love', an investigation could be made to determine if the deceased had a daughter with the name provided in the purported suicide letter or note. If indeed the deceased had a daughter by such name, such a suicide letter or note can be regarded as authentic.

Although in some cases the authors did not specifically indicate the exact relationship between them and the addressee/s, how they were related to each other can be established from context or through the phrases used e.g. the use of the phrase 'my flower' could be a man addressing a woman he was involved with in a romantic relationship. On the other hand, given the context, '**Sunday and her mother'** could refer to a wife/girlfriend and a mother in-law. If a match in terms of the relationship that existed can be established, there should be no doubt that a suicide message was indeed authored by the deceased.

Prior research papers have tried to evince the relationship between the authors of suicide letters and notes and the addressee/s. For example, Alfian (2018) conducts a linguistics pragmatic analysis of Nusadi's suicide note in which he (Nusadi) cited his parents as the addressees. Similarly, Handelman and Lester (2007) conduct a study on the suicide notes' content in which other authors have indicated whom the suicide messages were directed to. This was done through apologies to family members, friends and workmates for their actions.

The third aspect investigated to prove genuineness was the motive for the suicide act. Like with the first aspect under this objective, the motive for committing suicide is key in establishing the genuineness of a purported suicide message. This reveals what exactly transpired or what led to the act of self-killing.

The discourse analysis revealed the following as some of the motives for the suicide act:

- curse by evil spirits

- humiliation by relatives

- frustration

- enemies

- accusation and fear of going to jail

- infection with a deadly disease

- hopelessness/life too much to bear

- dysfunction of manhood as a result of witchcraft

The motives for the alleged suicide acts above, as revealed in the discourses, hold highly crucial probative value in terms of establishing their genuineness. In the same breadth, Fleuchen and Gloholt (2013) submit that the contents of suicide notes communicated the difficulties that made the authors to end their lives. They cited inner pain, aggression, mental illness and depression as some of the reasons that led them to take their own lives, whereas Rockett and Stack (2016) indicate that financial constraints such as bankruptcy, legal problems with the criminal justice system, unemployment, etc. to be some of the causes.

The last aspect investigated for genuineness of the purported suicide letter and notes was the authors' status. A purported suicide letter or note in which the author has revealed things such as wealth, employment and marital status amongst others is also helpful in determining the genuineness of the alleged suicide message. In the analysis of the messages, ownership of cattle, motor cars, pension package payouts and so on, were mentioned by the authors. The presence of such information in the alleged suicide messages is key in determining the genuineness of the messages. If such information could be verified and a match is established, the suicide message can therefore be regarded as genuine from a forensic linguistics perspective. For instance, if the author has provided information as to how much his pension package or investments payout would be, and how this should be divided and distributed among family members, such information can be relied upon because such is usually confidential and as such, this information is usually known by the deceased and his employer.

On the contrary, authors of suicide letters and notes examined by prior scholars have not evinced their status in terms of finances or ownership of properties such house, car and animals such as goats and cattle.

The presence of such information in the suicide letters and notes, can be relied on to establish that people who take their own lives are affected by common problems across the globe. In other words, such problems are not unique to people from Asia or Africa for example, but such are universal

problems which affect all humankind e.g. hopelessness, ill health, family burden, unemployment, etc.

This chapter focused on two sections i.e. Section A - the findings of the investigation of the purported suicide letters and notes, and Section B - the discussion thereof. The finding part of this chapter centered on what these purported suicide messages were composed of e.g. the types of lexical items used, general language use, the addressee/s, motives for the alleged suicide acts, etc. The discussion focused on whether such findings can prove the authenticity and genuineness of these purported suicide letters and notes. Section B therefore concluded that the findings such as the lexical items that were used by the authors, the addressee/s, motives for the suicide indicated that such suicide messages are indeed authentic and genuine.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 The authenticity of suicide letters and notes following a lexical forensic analysis

Based on the findings of the analysis of the lexical items of the suicide letters and notes for authenticity, the study established that the twelve deceased persons appeared to have been the actual authors of those texts. To prove this claim, the authors made use of lexical features (positive and negative) that hold significant probative value in that such items were found to be matching both the physical and psychological make-up of people whose lives generally appear to be compounded by insurmountable challenges in life. Such lexical items were all significant in the authentication of these suicide messages from a forensic stylistics/linguistics perspective. For example, negative lexical items which express fear, anxiety, despair, hopelessness, anger, infection, curse, etc. in a suicide message cast away assumptions that the suicide letters or notes were fabricated by other people to defeat the course of justice. Such lexical features also reveal important information such as the health status of the deceased, physical and emotional status, etc. Lexical items denoting positive emotions such as love, care or bidding of farewell to loved ones, friends, work/schoolmates, etc. in suicide messages also provided critical evidence to believe that the suicide messages appeared to have been authored by the deceased. As such, they can be regarded as authentic. Positive lexical items assume compassion, sympathy, love and care towards the addressee/s and some other people such as friends and neighbors. As asserted before, even if an individual had intended to end his or her life, the natural bonds and affection that existed before will always remain and as such, can also be manifested in dying declarations.

5.1.2 The authors of suicide letters and notes in line with syntactic forensic framework

Investigating the general usage of language in suicide messages is one of the key aspects in establishing authenticity and genuineness from a forensic stylistics/linguistics perspective. Given the general use of language in the purported suicide letters and notes, the analysis revealed that most of the authors may not have received formal education. The authors demonstrated significant ineptitude in the general usage of language. General language usage by authors e.g. between men and women, young and elder authors, sentence construction, concord, spelling, sentence length, paragraphing, punctuation marks and ambiguity is critical in determining the authenticity and genuineness of purported suicide messages. In the literature review section, language is characterised as a communication tool that serves a multiplicity of unique and very important

human functions i.e. communication. It is one of the many attributes that differentiate people from each other. Every human being thus possesses the ability to use language distinctively. This is key from a forensic linguistics viewpoint as the authors of the analysed suicide letters and notes could be traced through language usage and in this case, through writing which was the major focus of the study. Since the language used in the purported suicide texts was matching the gender, age, etc. of the authors, the investigation can assume that these purported suicide letters and notes were authentic from a forensic linguistics point of view.

5.1.3 Evaluation of the genuineness of the suicide letters and notes through a discoursal forensic perspective

The investigation of the discourse of the purported suicide message is another significant aspect in forensic linguistics that is key to ascertaining genuineness. The discourses of suicide letters and notes can reveal important information that helps in establishing the actual author of a suicide message. The discourses can disclose critical information such as: motive/s behind the suicide act, the addressee/s, the relationship between the author and the addressee, feelings of guilt for committing the suicide act, directives given, etc. From a forensic stylistics/linguistics viewpoint, if such information e.g. the name/s of the person/people addressed in the suicide message is provided or match such a person/people, after an investigation has been conducted, there can be no doubt that the suicide text was actually authored by the deceased person, and as such, genuine.

5.2 Recommendations

Section 223 of the Criminal Procedure Act of 1977 of the Republic of Namibia reflects on the admissibility of dying declarations by stipulating that, ''The declaration made by any deceased person upon the apprehension of impending death shall be admissible or inadmissible in evidence if such a declaration would have been admissible or inadmissible as evidence on the thirtieth day of May, 1961.'' Suicide letters and notes (dying declarations) hold probative value and as recommended by the Act, should be admissible in the courts of law to litigate on cases of suspicious suicide deaths. Forensic stylistics/linguistics is a field in Applied Linguistics that is concerned with studies and investigations of suspicious language (written and spoken). Written language includes documents such as suicide letters and notes, signatures, contracts and wills. As indicated at the beginning of this paper, depending on the purpose, any written text (handwritten or typed), or voice message can be a forensic text or message and can be a subject of investigation for authenticity and genuineness.

On these grounds, the study recommends the following:

- A course in Forensic Linguistics should be developed and be taught in Namibian universities. This has the potential to attract interest from many aspiring Namibians to take up a career in Forensic Linguistics.

- Due to the escalation of suicide cases in the country today, all suicide letters and notes collected from, and around scenes of alleged suicide deaths should be subjected to thorough forensic investigation (if that does not take place at the moment) to establish their authenticity and genuineness.

- As the Act stipulates, dying declarations i.e. suicide letters and notes that appear suspicious should form part of evidence and be presented in the courts of law during litigations on suicide cases that appear suspicious.

- Forensic Linguists should liaise with Criminal Investigation Units (which appears to be not the case) in the investigation of documents that appear falsified such as suicide letters and notes.

- Forensic Linguistics labs should be established in all regions to assist in the investigation of documents alleged to have been falsified such as suicide letters and notes, etc.

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APPENDICES

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Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. *Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ lexical forensic analysis*		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
2. *Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ syntactic forensic framework*		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		✓
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

	Yes	No
Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ discoursal forensic perspective		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	✓	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

2

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. *Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>lexical forensic analysis</u>*		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?		✓
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
2. *Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ <u>syntactic forensic framework</u>*		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		✓
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?		✓

3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>

Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	✓	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. *Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>lexical forensic analysis</u>*		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy	✓	✗
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
2. *Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ <u>syntactic forensic framework</u>*		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		✓
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	✓	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

4

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. *Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>lexical forensic analysis</u>*		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
2. *Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ <u>syntactic forensic framework</u>*		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement	✓	
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. **Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>**		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	✓	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?	✗	✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ _lexical forensic analysis_		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
2. Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ _syntactic forensic framework_		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		✓
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	✓	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. *Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>lexical forensic analysis</u>*		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy	✓	
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry		✓
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
2. *Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ <u>syntactic forensic framework</u>*		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		✓
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ discoursal forensic perspective		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	✓
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?	✓	✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

7

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ _lexical forensic analysis_		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand		✓
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
2. Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ _syntactic forensic framework_		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement	✓	
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?	✓	

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	✓
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	✓	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. _Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ lexical forensic analysis_		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry		✓
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	✗	✓
2. _Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ syntactic forensic framework_		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

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Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ _lexical forensic analysis_		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	✓	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
2. Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ _syntactic forensic framework_		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		✓
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

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Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	✓	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

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Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ _lexical forensic analysis_		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		✓
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	✓	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		✓
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?		✓
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	✓	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
2. Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ _syntactic forensic framework_		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement	✓	
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		✓

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	✓	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ discoursal forensic perspective		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?		✓
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		✓
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	✓	

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Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>lexical forensic analysis</u>		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy		X
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	X	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		X
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	X	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand		X
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
2. Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ <u>syntactic forensic framework</u>		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		X
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		X
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		X
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		X

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Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	X	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	X	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ <u>discoursal forensic perspective</u>		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	X	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?	X	
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		X
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	X	X

Data Collection Instrument

Content Analysis Checklist

Items to be Analysed	Yes	No
1. Determine the authenticity of suicide letters and suicide notes/ _lexical forensic analysis_		
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating positive emotions? e.g. happy	X	
Are there words in the suicide letters/notes indicating negative emotions? e.g. angry	X	
Are there formal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. obtain		X
Are there informal words/phrases used in the suicide letter/note? e.g. what's up?	X	
Can the words used in the suicide letters/notes be traced to a specific social group/class, region, etc? e.g. southand	X	
Are there any specific errors in the spelling of certain words in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
2. Description of suicide letters and suicide note authors/ _syntactic forensic framework_		
Have the authors structured the sentences in the suicide letters/notes according to English grammar rule? e.g. Subject Verb Agreement		X
Have the authors used decipherable sentences in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
Have the authors used ambiguous sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		X
Have the authors used shorter sentences in the suicide letters/notes?		X
Have the authors punctuated sentences in the suicide letters/notes accordingly?		X

Are the young suicide letters/notes authors different from elder authors in terms of sentence structure?	X	
Are male suicide letters/notes authors different from female authors in terms of sentence structure?	X	
3. Evaluation of the genuineness of suicide letters and suicide notes/ discoursal forensic perspective		
Did the addressors clearly state who the addressee/s is/are in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
Did the addressor make clear the reason/s for committing suicide to the addressee/s?	X	
Did the addressor show any remorse towards the addressee/s?	X	
Did the addressor disclose his/her relationship with the addressee/s in the suicide letters/notes?	X	
Did the addressor reveal his/her status in terms of power in the society in the suicide letters/notes?		X
Did the addressor use formal language in the suicide letters/notes?		X
Did the addressor use informal language in the suicide letters/notes?	X	

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FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (F-REC)

DECISION: ETHICS EXEMPTION

NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ref: S004/2021

Issue Date: 25 August 2021

The Faculty of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (F-REC) of the Namibia University of Science and Technology reviewed ethical clearance applications of Master in English and Applied Linguistics (MEAL) students and exempt the under listed students for ethical clearance requirement as the research as set out in the application is deemed as desktop study research.

No.	Student Number	Full Names	Research Topic / Title	Supervisor (s)
1	20010451	Jason Kapuka Kanyama **+264 81 391 7801** **+264 65 263 600**	A Forensic Stylistics Investigation of Suicide Letters and Suicide Notes in Oshikoto and Oshana Regions in Northern Namibia	Prof Haileleul Z Woldemariam Dr Pilisano Masake
2	214078892	Ndamononghenda Ndalipo Ndatyapo **+264 81 413 2337** **+264 81 606 8789**	A Forensic Linguistic Investigation of Witness Statements on Murder Cases in Windhoek Police Station	Prof Haileleul Z Woldemariam Dr Pilisano Masake
3	214007138	Sarafina Maano Frans **+264 81 756 7367** **+264 65 230 401**	*Hegemony and resistance in A Man of the People, Anthills of the Savannah and Purple Hibiscus: A postcolonial study*	Prof Sarala Krishnamurthy

We would like to point out that, principal investigator (s), are obliged to:

- maintain the ethical integrity of your research,
- adhere to the Research policy and ethical guidelines of NUST, and
- remain within the scope of your research proposal and supporting evidence as submitted to the F-REC.

Should any aspect of your research change from the information as presented to the F-REC, which could have an effect on the possibility of harm to any research subject, you are under the obligation to report it immediately to your supervisor or F-REC as applicable in writing. Should there be any uncertainty in this regard, you have to consult with the F-REC.

We wish you success with your research, and trust that it will make a positive contribution to the quest for knowledge at NUST.

Sincerely,

Dr Godfrey Tubaundule
Acting Associate Dean: Research and Innovation
Tel: +264 61 207-2932 / 2325
E-mail: gtubaundule@nust.na

Dr Pilisano Masake
Acting Dean: FoHS
Tel: +264 61 207-2063 / 2325
E-mail: pmasake@nust.na

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Namibian Police Force

MINISTRY OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

Tel. No: (+264 61) 209 3111
Fax: No: (+264 61) 220 621

Enquiries: Comm Mafwila/ W/O (1) Ngesheya

Our Ref.:   8/3/1
Your Ref.:

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL
Namibian Police Force
Private Bag 12024
Ausspannplatz
WINDHOEK
Namibia

09 July 2021

Mr. J.K. Kanyama
P.O Box 857
ONDANGWA

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A FORENSIC STYLISTICS INVESTIGATIO/STUDY ON SUICIDE LETTER/NOTES OSHIVELO AND OMUTHIYA

1. The above mentioned subject matter has reference.

2. Your request to conduct academic research study in the Namibian Police Force titled: *"A Forensic Stylistics Investigation of Suicide Letters and Suicide Notes in Oshikoto Region"* is hereby **approved**.

3. You are urged to ensure that information that will be provided to you will be treated with higher level of confidentiality and will not be used for any other reason other than this academic research.

4. Your interest and willingness to carry out a research study within the Namibian Police Force is highly appreciated. Hence, this office would appreciate sharing the research findings with the Namibian Police Force.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

NAMIBIAN POLICE
WINDHOEK
1 2 JUL 2021
: LT-GEN

S.H. NDEITUNGA
INSPECTOR-GENERAL: NAMIBIAN POLICE FORCE

Dep Comm Steenkamp (F)
Handle further
2021/09/16

NAMIBIAN POLICE
Regional Commander
2021 -09- 16
OSHANA REGION

POL 716

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Namibian Police Force

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, IMMIGRATION, SAFETY AND SECURITY

Tel. No: (+264 61) 209 3111		OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL
Fax: No: (+264 61) 220 621	CONFIDENTIAL	Namibian Police Force
		Private Bag 12024
Enquiries: Comm Mafwila/ W/O (1) Katale		-Ausspannplatz
		WINDHOEK
Our Ref.: 8/3/1		Namibia
Your Ref.:		

S/C - Forensic Path
Further handling pls

13 September 2021

Mr. J.K. Kanyama
P.O Box 857
ONDANGWA

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A FORENSIC STYLISTICS INVESTIGATIONS /STUDY ON SUICIDE LETTERS/NOTES AT OSHAKATI POLICE STATION; OSHANA REGION

1. The above subject matter refers.

2. Kindly be informed that your to conduct academic research titled: *"A Forensic Stylistics Investigation of Suicide Letters and Suicide Notes in Oshikoto and Oshana Regions in Northern Namibia"* is hereby approved.

3. You are hereby urged to ensure that information that will be provided to you will be treated with high level of confidentiality and will not be used for any other purpose except for only this academic research.

4. Your interest and willingness to carry out a research study is highly appreciated. Hence, this office would appreciate sharing the research outcome with the Namibian Police Force.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

NAMIBIAN POLICE
WINDHOEK
1 4 SEP 2021

:LT-GEN
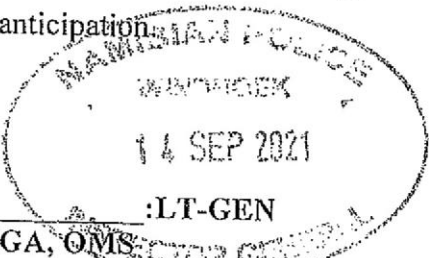
S. H. NDEITUNGA, OMS.
INSPECTOR-GENERAL: NAMIBIAN POLICE FORCE
Cc: Oshana Regional Commander