

# Culpability Denial and Admissibility in Suicide Notes in Nigeria: A Linguistic Interrogation

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## ***Abstract***

*This paper is motivated by the global statistics on the number of suicide victims recorded yearly and the near absence of lingo-social orientation towards the prevention of suicide. In this study, we adopt a linguistic approach that involves looking at pre-suicide interactions (what suicide victims say prior to their committing suicide) and suicide notes (what they say at the point of suicide). Data are collected, using purposive sampling technique, from selected Nigerian newspapers: Daily Sun and Vanguard Newspapers and other textual sources like Facebook pages of suicide victims where the researchers are able to glance through pre—suicide comments of suicide victims and their suicide notes. Theoretically, two aspects of Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) —'transitivity' and 'modality' guided the analyses. The analyses show that people's linguistic choices are strong pointer to the intent and execution of suicidal ideation. Such linguistic choices are majorly characterised by expression of hopelessness, self-defeat, the use of rhetorical interrogatives and expression of atheistic ideations.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, suicide, culpability denial, transitivity, modality

## **Introduction**

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) estimates that over 800,000 people die by suicide annually. This translates to an approximate age-standardized suicide rate of 11.5 per 100,000 persons, or one suicide death every 40 seconds. Nigeria, for example, has been placed fifth globally in terms of suicide rate, with 15,000 suicides per 100,000 people worldwide (Spectator Index, 2018). Suicidal thoughts are one of the best indicators of suicide attempts, according to earlier research (Law, Jin, & Anestis, 2018; McHugh, Corderoy, Ryan, Hickie, & Large, 2019; Ribeiro et al.

2016). Suicidal ideation and attempts can have detrimental effects, including injury, hospitalization, and death, as well as cost society billions of dollars (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010a). The trauma, suffering, and anguish caused by suicide have been enormous. In light of the aforementioned circumstances, it is evident that engagement, evaluation, understanding, and prevention of suicide and suicidal behaviours are necessary.

May, Klonsky, and Saffer (2016) claim that progress in suicide research and theory has been hampered by lack of precise and uniform nomenclature. Their research revealed that different writers employ the word 'suicidal behavior' to refer to any suicidal idea or deed, without making a distinction between ideas and plans, unsuccessful efforts, and attempts that result in death. Similarly, some writers use the term 'self-harm' to describe deliberate self-harm that is not intended to result in death. Some people interpret the phrase to include all deliberate self-harming behaviours, regardless of whether they are intended to be fatal or not (i.e., none suicidal self-injury behaviours, such as superficial skin cutting). Various facets of suicidality and self-harm range in terms of their occurrence rates, purposes, clinical correlates, and for this reason the current researchers believe that using accurate definitions and terminology throughout this study should be essential.

The word 'suicide' refers to any self-inflicted death that results from intentional harm done with the intention of dying as a result of the behaviour. Suicide attempts, on the other hand, entail harming oneself in an attempt to end one's life, even if it does not end in death. This suggests that an individual's intention, rather than the extent of harm it inflicts, determines whether or not there is a suicide attempt. Suicidal ideation also refers to the act of pondering, thinking about, or preparing to commit suicide. Suicidal thoughts and attempts are frequently assumed to be significantly predicted by three psychological variables: impulsivity, hopelessness, and depression.

Much of researches on suicide and suicidal ideation tend to emanate from the field of psychology such as the works of Choo, Kuek, & Burton (2018), Davidson, Anestis, & Gutierrez (2017), Kreuze et al. (2017), Lai, Maniam, Chan, & Ravindran (2014), Limburg, Watson, Hagger, & Egan (2017), Meehan, Mannix, Zafonte, & Pascual-Leone (2015), Melia et al., 2020, Notredame et al., 2019; Pospos et al., 2018; Stange, Kleiman, Mermelstein, & Trull, 2019; Weisel et al., 2019. In this work, the researchers think that because language serves as a thought form and a communication medium, studies on suicide should consider linguistic choices as part of the primary indicators of suicidal ideation. This is consistent with the opinion of Homan et al. (2022), who maintain that language provides a special window into people's emotional worlds and the human mind, and that this window may help identify patients who are at the risk of suicide.

As a result, the current research project takes a bifocal approach to studying suicide victims' language preferences. These include conversations that occur prior to suicide and are associated with suicidal ideation as well as responsibility denial tactics and suicide notes. In particular, denying culpability means denying responsibility or de-

responsibility; it entails not accepting accountability for a specific conduct by assigning or transferring the blame to another party. This essay aims to investigate word choices that suggest suicidal thoughts and to emphasise the ways in which suicide victims absolve themselves of responsibility. Three distinct goals will serve as the focus of the study: (i) investigate the connection between a person's word choice and the likelihood that they would try suicide; (ii) highlight the ways in which suicide victims downplay their guilt in their suicide notes; and (iii) connect suicide notes and pre-suicide exchanges to the broader suicide prevention initiative.

### **Review of Related Literature**

This review recognizes that there is a substantial body of research on suicide and suicidal ideation from a psychological perspective, and just a little amount from a linguistic one. We shall talk about related efforts in these fields one after the other.

### **Psychological perspectives to suicide**

In 2002, Brown, Henriques, Xie, Hollander, and Beck carried out a study to look at the efficacy of clinical characteristics linked to suicide. The goal of the study was to evaluate the efficacy of a 10-session cognitive therapy intervention intended to stop adults who had recently tried suicide from attempting suicide again. Bryan and Rudd (2006) conducted a review on integration of empirically grounded developments in the assessment of suicidality, which is comparable to the work mentioned above. The authors distinguished between prediction and risk assessment, and they shared Brown et al.'s (2022) emphasis on the significance of time in risk assessment. In their research on adolescent suicide risk factors, Alizadeh, et al. (2018) support the assertion made by Bryan and Rudd (2006) that suicidal vulnerability and factors are avoidable as long as they are recognized and the person receiving treatment—both medical and psychological—is addressed.

Fawcett, Fogg, and Scheftner (1990) discovered nine clinical characteristics that are linked to suicide after studying 954 psychiatric patients with significant affective disorders. Six of these are linked to suicide within a year: severe psychic anxiety, panic attacks, reduced concentration, worldwide insomnia, moderate alcohol abuse, and severe loss of interest or pleasure (anhedonia). The remaining three are linked to suicide that occurs beyond a year: severe hopelessness, suicidal ideation, and history of prior suicide attempts. Similar to the findings made by Bryan and Rudd (2006), Fawcett et al. (1990) draw a conclusion akin to Bryan and Rudd (2006), stating that various predictors based on the time to suicide imply that the long-term suicide patients would have experienced symptoms akin to those of the short-term groups within a year of their suicide.

Other related papers include those by van Dar Wall (1990), which assessed empirical research on bereavement following suicide; Fawcett, Fogg, and Scheftner (1990), which examined the clinical characteristics linked to suicidal ideators; Shepherd and Baraclough (2018), which considered Durkheim's theory regarding the protective nature of work and suicide rate; Turker, Haggan, and Hill (2018), which examined hopelessness and burdensomeness as significant risk factors for the desire for suicide

and suicide risk; and Sun and Zhang (2017), who investigated the connection between psychological strains and suicidal intents.

### **Linguistic perspectives to suicide**

A few academics have looked into the reasons of suicide from linguistic angles. They include scholars such as Fata, et al. (2021) who evaluated the characteristics of linguistic features enfolded in suicide notes; Jasim and Jaafar (2022) whose work focused on linguistic stylistic analysis of suicide notes; Roubidox (2012) whose work is on linguistic manifestation of power in suicide notes; Homan, et al. (2022) whose work is an evaluation of the linguistic features of suicidal thoughts; Erlangsen, et al. (2016) whose focus were on the prosodic alteration in individuals with suicidal intentions and Krifka, (2007); Musan, (2002) whose works focused on the morpho-syntactic features of suicide notes.

The above works which adopted linguistic perspective to the study of suicide relate to the present work in that they are all linguist approach to the understanding of suicide but differ from it in three significant ways: (i) in contrast to the previous studies, the data used for this include pre-suicide comments and suicide notes from Nigerian suicide victims; (ii) none of the previously mentioned studies examined suicide notes from the angles of guilt denial or acceptance; (iii) the reviewed works neglected to consider remarks made prior to suicide. Thus, the aforementioned make up the scholarly vacuum that the current study seeks to fill.

### **Theoretical concerns**

This study uses two analytical foci taken from Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). They consist of transitivity and modality. While the latter is concerned with language's ideational function and is regarded by Halliday (1981) as the cornerstone of the semantic organization of experience, the former deals with the inter-personal function of language.

Modality has been used, loosely, to describe linguistic attitudinal characteristics. According to Halliday (1994), modality is the domain of meaning that falls between yes and no, or the middle ground between polarities that are positive and negative. The decision between positive and negative, or between doing and not doing, is known as polarity. Every finite operator has two forms: a negative form, which is: isn't, wasn't, hasn't can't (or is not, cannot...), and a positive form, which is: was, has, can, etc. Halliday notes that there are intermediate degrees of possibility, so the options are not just a binary choice between yes and no. In between are other forms of indeterminacy, such as 'sometimes' or 'maybe.' Modality is the aggregate word for these degrees that lie between the positive and negative poles.

Generally speaking, modality refers to a speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence. (Simpson, 1993). It relates to modalisation on one hand: how likely it is to be true or how frequently it is true, and modulation on the other: to what degree the command or the compliance is affected. Modality is a major component for interrogation of interpersonal function of

language. The interrogation of the modal system identified in the data will aid the researcher to evaluate the modal commitment of the suicide victims to the different propositions raised in the data.

The term 'transitivity' as used here should not be confused with the term used to describe the transitive or intransitive nature of different verbs. According to Beard (2000, p.30) 'transitivity involves looking at the language used to describe:

what happens  
who the participants are (both those who do something and those affected by what is done)  
what the circumstances are.'

The theory of transitivity system plays an important part in the ideational function, by which the grammatical system is achieved. In the domain of functional grammar, transitivity is a semantic notion, and the transitivity system refers to a system for describing the whole clause as observed by Halliday (1994). He maintains that transitivity system construes the experience of the world through a manageable set of process types. He identifies six processes: material processes, mental processes, relational processes, behavioural processes, verbal processes and existential processes (Halliday, 1994). Fowler (1991, p. 71) sees transitivity as 'the foundation of representation'.

Typically, the process is realised by the verbal group, the participant by the nominal group, and the circumstantial element by the adverbial group or the prepositional phrase. The concepts of process, participant and circumstantial element offer the frame of reference to compound the experience of what goes on outside and inside.

Material processes are processes of doing. They express the notion that some entity does something which may be done to some other entity (Halliday, 1994). There are two inherent participants involved in material processes. The first is the 'actor' which is an obligatory element and expresses the doer of the process (Halliday&Matthiessen, 2004). The second is the 'goal' which is an optional element and expresses the person or entity whether animate or inanimate affected by the process.

Mental process refers to a process of sensing which is concerned with the sense of thoughts, observations and sentiments. It is actually a reflection of people's awareness of states of being. There are four sub-types of sensing in mental clauses: perceptive (processes of seeing, hearing, etc.), cognitive (processes of deciding, knowing, understanding, etc.), desiderative (processes of wanting, etc.) and emotive processes of liking, hating, regretting, etc.). There are two participants associated with a mental process, that is, senser and phenomenon.

Relational Process involves states of being (including having). In a relational process, a relationship is being set up between two separate entities, but without suggesting that one entity affects the other in any way (Halliday, 1994). Relational processes can be

classified into two modes: Attributive and Identifying. They are classified according to whether they are being used to identify something or to assign a quality to something (Gerot & Wignell, 1994).

### **Methodology**

Data are collected, using purposive sampling technique, from selected Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Sun* and *Vanguard Newspapers* and other textual sources like Facebook pages of suicide victims where the researchers are able to glance through pre-suicide comments of suicide victims and their suicide notes which in some cases are made available by the suicide victims on the said social media spaces and in some cases by friends of the victims. The data collection spans a period of nine months (2nd March, 2022 —9th November, 2022).

Because of some issues bordering on research ethics, the researchers have avoided the names of the suicide victims whose pre-suicide comments and suicide notes make up the sample for this study. They, instead, have labelled them as victims 1 through 7. The study identifies two categories of suicide victims: those that left notes and those that left no notes. There is a preponderance of the latter category but the researchers pay more attention to the former category given the fact that they are carrying out a linguistic research which largely relies on textual data for evidence and conclusions.

The researchers investigate how the victims try to deny being culpable in the suicide notes available to them. They also examine the linguistic choices of suicide victims prior to the act of committing suicide. This, they believe, will prompt the general public on linguistic choices that signal suicidal ideation so as to prevent easy access to a means of suicide – such as pesticides or firearms which can make the difference as to whether a person lives or dies. This is done following Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). Specifically, two aspects of SFG—transitivity and modality are utilised in the analysis. Transitivity helps the researchers to activate passivated agents in attempt to deny culpability in the suicide notes while modality aids the researchers' determination of the modal commitments of the victims especially at the level of pre-suicide interactions.

### **Presentation and Analyses of Data**

Two categories of data are analysed here. They include those occurring as texts and those occurring as semiotic signs. The earlier category is further classified into suicide notes preceded with pre-suicide comments and suicide notes without pre-suicide comments. Our sample covers a total of eight suicide notes out of which seven occur as texts and one as a semiotic object. Out of the seven occurring as texts, five do not have pre-suicide comments while two do. We begin with the suicide notes with pre suicide comments.

#### **VICTIM 1 (V1)**

##### **Pre-suicide comments (suicidal ideation)**

- a) Seriously, why are we here? Why the fights, survival, struggle, fear, death?  
What is the grand purpose/ why am I here? **Source: Victim's FB Account**



—March 11, 2022

b) Say “alone.”

Alone. Alone.

Come on. Say it like you mean it.

Alone. Alone. Alone. **Source: Victim's FB Account** —March 15, 2022

The 'victim 1' part of the above interaction begins with a modal adverb 'seriously' expressing an epistemic system. It expresses a strong modal commitment to the proposition which is that 'life is not worth living'. Through the use of interrogative mood, V1 is asking information of the addressee, but the addressee, this time, is not expected to provide information, a situation capable of amplifying hopelessness, being that the above belongs to the class of rhetorical interrogatives. There will be no one to address the issues of 'why we are here', 'why all the fights' and many more, as raised by V1. The hopelessness expressed by the speaker is further reinforced through negative polarity as the entire idea is marked by expressions of disappointment.

Another linguistic tool employed by V1 in his expression of hopelessness in 'a' and 'b' is reiteration. Specifically, two kinds of reiteration are identified above. They are contrastive and inclusive reiteration corresponding to the relations of oppositeness and sameness, respectively. Expressions like 'struggle' 'death' exemplify contrastive reiteration. For instance, the word 'struggle' connotes effort/desire to live and not to die. The use of the two contrasting items 'struggle' and 'death', one preceding the other, demonstrates how contrastive reiteration is used in expressing hopelessness. On the other hand, in 'Alone. Alone. Come on. Say it like you mean it. Alone. Alone. Alone' instantiate the use of inclusive reiteration. The lexical item 'Alone' is reiterated to foreground the amount of hopelessness expressed by V1. In all, the above designate V1's modal commitment to suicidal ideation.

### **V1's suicide note**

'Forgive me, in case you are the one who found the body, I am really sorry. I have chosen Jo Nketaih's poem as my suicide note 'they said you came looking for me. I didn't drown; I was the water.' Where do atheists go when they die? Lol.' Amen. **Source: Victim's FB Account.**—May 12, 2022.

V1 tends to accept culpability in his suicide note through the use of ontological metaphors: 'drown', 'water' as they appear in Jo Nketaih's poem. To admit that he is not drawn and assume the status of the water which possesses the power of drowning is to accept culpability. By the above lines, V1 assumes a bi-polar status of actor and goal. He is the instigator and the sufferer of the action so instigated. Every other external force is unambiguously exempted in the act. Interestingly, out of the entire samples for this study, only V1 and V5 accept culpability in their suicide notes. However, other pre-suicide comments of V1 accessed by the researcher show that he also tries to deny culpability by blaming his actions on lack of parental affection. As will be shown in subsequent suicide notes to be presented by the researcher here, it seems that each time a suicide victim accepts culpability, they do so to avoid incriminating close ones. This

view is sustained by the linguistic choices of VICTIM 2 in his suicide note.

## VICTIM 2 (V2)

### Pre-suicide comments (suicidal ideation)

'The Light is gradually dimming out'. **Source: Victim's FB Account**—July 24, 2022  
VICTIM 2 commits suicide sixteen (16) days after making the above Facebook post.

Specifically, in the above pre-suicide comment, V1 tries to deny culpability through agency deletion. This is because the light that is dimming out has an agent acting on it which has been strategically deleted leaving us with an agentless clause. Knowing that the deleted agent is V1 while the light dimming out is his life, we can rely on the powers of transitivity analysis to activate the passivated agent for discourse clarity through clausal transposition:

VICTIM 2	is dimming	out	the light
<i>actor</i>	<i>process: material</i>	<i>circumstance</i>	<i>goal</i>

The above transitivity system has helped us to see the on-goings in the above sentence (who does what, to whom and under what circumstance?). The actor is, therefore, activated to aid discourse clarity. Simply put, 'light' as used above is a metaphor for V2's life. We are, however, aware that in the above circumstance, 'light' does not have the power to instigate the action being attributed to it. In other words, 'light' isn't dimming itself but is being dimmed by an external agent as has been made clear through the transitivity analysis.

### V2's suicide note

'The best', that is what I call you. Finally, this is the end of my journey here on earth. The evil I have been battling with has succeeded in quenching the flame. You married a wrong man. You're a good woman and you deserve the best. You need to be happy. You need to soar. Please take care of our princess, \*\*\*\*. Tell her that I love her so much. Be peaceable with everyone though not gonna be easy. Tell my family not to harbour any resentment against you. You are a blessing to us. That's the wish of a dying man. Don't cry for me but pray for me. I love you and \*\*\*\*\* so much. Good bye my beloved.  
**Source: Daily Sun- 29 July, 2022**

He commits suicide on July 26, 2022

VICTIM 2 denies culpability through two specific strategies: agency deletion and agency transfer. By agency deletion is meant V2's admission that a journey (his human existence) has come to an end as implicated in the expression 'this is the end of my journey here on earth'. He does this without a mention of what brings the journey to an end. Here, V2 makes appeal to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) idea of structural metaphor so that a conceptual mapping of the above expression will leave us with the following:

LIFE            IS            A JOURNEY



*target domain**source domain*

Literally speaking, a journey does not end itself. It is ended by the person embarking on the journey. Consequently, the journey of life which V2 claims that it is ending must have an actor/agent with the intention to end it. A transposed structure subjected to transitivity examination will aid our understanding of V2's role in the above.

I,	by this writing,	end	my journey	here on
earth				
<i>actor</i>	<i>circumstance</i>		<i>process: material</i>	<i>goal</i>
<i>circumstance</i>				

Of critical discourse significance is the use of 'this' in 'this is the end of my journey here on earth'. 'This' which has been realised as 'by this writing' in the transposed structure is shown to be a dummy determiner as it doesn't seem to perform the action attributed to it. For instance, the transposed form tends to suggest that it is 'the act of writing' [the suicide note] that (takes his life) ends the journey. Since it is obvious that the circumstantial adjunct 'by this writing' cannot take a life, we shall adjust the transposed form to rid the structure of ambiguity, as in:

I	end	my journey	here on
earth			
<i>actor</i>	<i>process: material</i>		<i>goal</i>
<i>circumstance</i>			

The second transposed form is set-free from every linguistic item capable of obscuring discourse clarity. For instance, unlike the first transposed form which is modalised with 'by this writing', the latter form is a non-modalised structure expressing a categorical assertion. Specifically, V2's epistemic commitment to the proposition being expressed in the first transposition is qualified by 'by this writing' which restricts the epistemic commitment to the speaker's commitment or otherwise to the truth of the proposition expressed. Clearly, the researchers hold the view that just as an epistemically non-modal expression like 'It is raining' conveys a stronger commitment than the modalised counterpart 'it must be raining', the second transposed form 'I end my journey here on earth' expresses a stronger degree of speaker's commitment to the basic proposition than the first transposed form 'I, by this writing, end my journey here on earth'. The above elimination of linguistic choices that obscure discourse clarity helps us to see the degree of V2's determination to take his life.

Similarly, V2 further denies culpability through agency transfer as obtains in the expression 'the evil I have been battling with has succeeded in quenching the flame'. Here, the agency status has been assigned to 'non-specified' agent 'the evil I have been battling with' thereby suppressing the activities of V2 in quenching of the 'flame' which is equally a metaphor for his existence. Furthermore, we are presented with an agentless clause in 'that's the wish of a dying man' where V2 presents his case as someone whose life is being taken by a force more than man. Ordinarily, the phrase 'a

dying man' will be appropriate for a man who lacks the capacity to save his life. Contrastively, V2 has the options of taking his life or not to take it available to him which implies that he should, at least, accept culpability for his actions.

In line with our earlier contention that suicide victims tend to accept culpability in attempt not to incriminate intimate persons, V2 subtly accepts culpability towards the end of his suicide note as shown in the following 'Tell my family not to harbour any resentment against you'. V2 strategically exonerates his wife from all possible blames in relation to his death. This is related to what we have in V1 'I didn't drown; I was the water' but also differs from it because while there is outright culpability acceptance in V1, same cannot be said of V2.

### **Suicide notes without pre-suicide comments**

#### **Victim 3 (V3)'s suicide note**

'I am so sorry I had to leave you this way. Maryann ... You have been more than a bestie to me. I am also sorry to all my friends and well-wishers. I look happy but I'm nothing but a broken child. I don't believe in God anymore, cos I can't see my purpose anymore. I love you all so much.

Phone password \* \* \* \*, ATM PIN \* \* \* \*, Amount \* \* \* \*

Please burry me immediately I'm found dead.

Love you!— **Source: Vanguard Newspapers- 3rd April, 2022**

#### **Victim 4 (V4)'s suicide note**

'Mommade life a living hell for me. She is responsible for my family's predicaments. I hope and believe that now that I am gone, it will bring her relief and happiness'. **Source: Victim's FB Account**— October 6, 2022

#### **Victim 5 (V5)'s suicide note**

'THE WORLD IS NOT WORTHY TO BE LIVING.

You as a person need people around you to make life lively. Yet those same people are so wicked, cruel and heartless. Why? People do evil to people they ought to help. People are collecting from those they ought to be giving...human feelings are absent from human beings. Why? Is this life worth living at all?

Although all these might not be genuine enough for a person like me to poison myself... Never trace my death to someone else but me; I decided this on my own'.

**Source: Victim's FB Account**— September 21, 2022

#### **Victim 6 (V6)'s suicide note**

'Son, you are the one that put me into this problem, which made me to take my life. 3.35pm'.— **Source: Daily Sun- November 4, 2022**

A constant denominator in the above suicide notes is the expression of love for those the victims are leaving behind as instantiated in 'Tell her that I love her so much', 'I love you all so much', applying to victims 2 and 3 respectively. It is however strange how suicide victims go further to hurt the same people they profess to love by taking their own lives. Nonetheless, it appears that the powers of depression (I look happy but I'm nothing but a broken child; I can't see my purpose anymore), disappointments (People

do evil to people they ought to help; People are collecting from those they ought to be giving), lack of parental care (Mommade life a living hell for me) usually outweighs the love that suicide victims have for their own lives and those they leave behind.

We also see that here, victims 3, 4, 5 and 6 deny culpability through agency suppression and transfer. For instance, victim 3 suppresses self as the agent and tends to blame his death on his despondent condition thereby making immaterial phenomenon 'despondency' the agent that causes his death. Through agency transfer, Victim 4 nominates 'Mom' as the categorical agent in her death. Similarly, victim 6 nominates son as being responsible for his death while victim 5, just like 3, deny culpability by shifting responsibility to people through agency-genericisation which further obscures discourse clarity.

**Victim 7 (V7)** announces his intention to take his life through a semiotic system. He uploads a poisonous container as Facebook profile picture. His siblings in Enugu had to rush to his Maidugri home but find him dead on arrival.



**Poisonous bottle uploaded by victim 7**  
**Source: Victim's FB Account** —27 July, 2022

V7 denies culpability by activating a poisonous bottle as the agent responsible for his death. However, we understand that he 'voluntarily' takes the poison since the poison on its own cannot instigate the action being attributed to it. The above is a bottle containing poisonous substance for rats and other insects and not meant for human consumption. It implies, therefore, that any human who intentionally takes the substance, and dies as a result, is responsible for their death.

### **Findings**

Three objectives have guided this study and they are to examine the relationship between people's choice of words and their chances of attempting suicide, highlight how suicide victims deny culpability in suicide notes, and relate pre-suicide interactions and suicide notes to the overall effort at suicide prevention. The analyses show that people's linguistic choices are strong pointer to suicidal ideation. Such linguistic choices are majorly characterised by expression of hopelessness (I can't see

my purpose anymore), self-defeat(The light is gradually dimming out), rhetorical interrogatives (why are we here?), and atheistic ideation (the thought and consequent belief in the non-existent, the negation of being, of God). This can be justified from the following, attributed to victims 1, 3 and 7 respectively: 'Where do atheists go when they die [?]', 'I don't believe in God anymore'. The suicide victims tend to lose hope in the existence of God when it becomes difficult to strike a constant or assured interpretation of life, as they grapple with the deepest questions of existence like 'Is this life worth living at all?' as posed by V3. The analyses also reveal that suicide victims denied culpability through the activation of ontological metaphors, agency suppression, transfer or deletion and, sometimes, by assigning agency status to a semiotic signs (insecticide).

### Recommendations

The researcher recommends that people should pay attention to the language use and choice of words of their loved ones both on online and/or offline media. They should be sensitive to their conversations so as to flag words that point to possible suicidal behaviour, when they are uttered. Such attention/sensitivity will prompt them on linguistic choices that signal suicidal ideation so as to prevent easy access to a means of suicide, such as pesticides or firearms which can make the difference as to whether a person lives or dies.

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