

ATTITUDINAL MEANING IN KEVIN CARTER'S SUICIDE NOTE
Makna Sikap dalam Catatan Bunuh Diri Kevin Carter

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mendeskripsikan makna sikap di dalam sebuah catatan bunuh diri berdasarkan pendekatan Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional. Tujuan penelitian ini menggambarkan makna sikap yang meliputi afeksi, penilaian, dan apresiasi di dalam catatan bunuh diri Kevin Carter. Kevin Carter adalah seorang wartawan foto dari Afrika Selatan yang mendapat Pulitzer Prize pada tahun 1993 mengenai foto seekor burung nasar yang sedang mengamati seorang gadis kecil yang jatuh pingsan di depannya karena kelaparan yang bunuh diri pada usia 33 tahun. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode riset kualitatif. Data yang digunakan berasal dari catatan bunuh diri Kevin Carter, kemudian data tersebut diklasifikasi berdasarkan tiga elemen utama makna sikap. Para peneliti mendeskripsikan hasil penelitian, pertama, afeksi yang berhubungan dengan perasaan yang ditemukan di dalam catatan bunuh diri Kevin Carter menunjukkan emosi yang berhubungan dengan perasaan yang bersifat negatif. Kedua, penilaian atau etika berhubungan dengan sikap mengenai kebiasaan dan perilaku yang terdapat di dalam catatan bunuh diri Kevin Carter berhubungan dengan kutukan (celaan) yang bersifat negatif. Ketiga, apresiasi berhubungan dengan estetika yang melibatkan evaluasi yang ditunjukkan di dalam catatan bunuh diri Kevin Carter yang berhubungan dengan reaksi yang ditunjukkan oleh tipe proses (afeksi) sebagai interpersonal.

Kata Kunci: makna sikap, catatan bunuh diri, linguistik forensik, linguistik sistemik fungsional, sistem penilaian

Abstract

This study explicates attitudinal meaning in a suicide note based on Systemic Functional Linguistic approach. This research aims to figure out the attitudinal meaning including affect, judgment, and appreciation in Kevin Carter's suicide note. Kevin Carter was a photojournalist from South Africa who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1993 for a vulture patiently observing a little girl who collapsed in the forefront of hunger photograph who committed suicide in 33 years old. The method applied in this research is a qualitative research method. The data were taken from Kevin Carter's suicide note, then they were classified based on the three types of attitude elements. The present writers draw the result of the three attitudinal meaning elements, firstly the affects (feeling) found in the Kevin Carter's suicide note showed the emotions that deal with the negative feelings. Secondly, the judgment or ethics relate to attitude toward habit and behaviour delivered in the Kevin Carter's suicide note deals with condemn as the negative moral. The last, the appreciation connects to aesthetics which involves the evaluation indicated in the Kevin Carter's suicide note relates to the reaction which has a process type (affection) as an interpersonal.

Keywords: attitudinal meaning, suicide note, forensic linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, appraisal system

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a powerful tool for constructing different aims in evaluative language that have specific aims behind them. The evaluative language or appraisal concerns three different elements; they are ‘attitude’, ‘engagement’, and ‘graduation’. As Martin & Rose (2007) argued appraisal is a term used to evaluate the attitudes and feelings that are negotiated in a text, as well as the ways in which values are sourced and aligned with readers (Martin & Rose, 2007). Adjectives are the main means by which attitude is conveyed and given either a positive or negative value. Attitude is about how we feel, which includes emotional reactions, behavior judgments, and evaluation of things. Engagement is about sourcing attitudes and the use of voices around opinions in discourse. The focus of graduation is on the grading of phenomena, where feelings are amplified, and categories are blurred (Martin & White, 2005). This article focuses on attitudinal meaning that concerns three subsystems that reveal the specific meaning of a word as affect, judgment, and appreciation.

A suicide note is a note or letter detailing the reason for someone's suicide. The suicide note mentioned in this article is Kevin Carter's. Kevin Carter was known as a photojournalist from South Africa. As a South African who was born in Johannesburg, on 13 September 1960 he was the son of Jimmy Carter and Roma Carter. He began his career as a photographer in a week sports photographer for one year (1983-1984). Later, with his three photojournalists, he pioneered and became a participant of the Bang-Bang Club which the club became famous in South Africa. In 1993, he got an opportunity for the United Nations Operation Lifeline Sudan which gave him a chance to travel to South Sudan to report the extreme scarcity of food. At this time, he had an occasion to capture the most famous image of his work, a vulture patiently observing a little girl who collapsed in the forefront from hunger. His photograph first emerged in ‘The New York Times’ on 26 March 1993 and made a series of questions related to the girl. Since it was launched by ‘The New York Times’, it was becoming popular and finally he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1993. The Pulitzer Prize photograph he won is entitled “The Vulture and the Little Girl” and it is also known as “The Struggling Girl” (TheFamousPeople.com, n.d.).

Almost one year after publishing his photograph, on 27 July 1994 at 33 years old, Kevin Carter committed suicide (McCabe, 2014). It was reported that he inhaled the carbon monoxide poisoning in his car. The tragedy happened a couple of months after accepting his Pulitzer Prize (Yeong, 2014). He decided to commit suicide in his red pickup truck in the area in Parkmore when he was a child used to play (TheFamousPeople.com, n.d.). The death of Kevin Carter was reported by Dhar (2016) as one of “10 Chilling Suicides Notes of Famous People” besides Adolf Hitler, Hunter S. Thompson, Per “Dead” Ohlin, Christine Chubbuck, Kurt Cobain, Virginia Woolf, Jiah Khan, George Sanders, and Sid Vicious (Dhar, 2016).

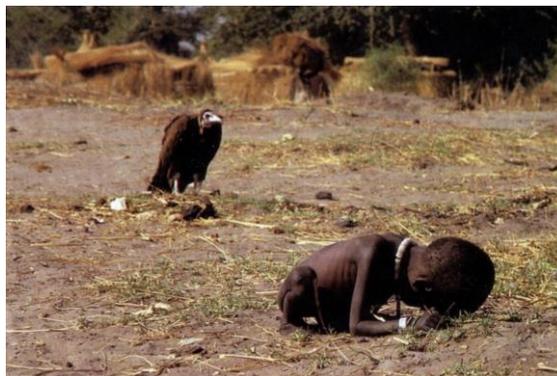


Figure 1.

Photo: Kevin Carter

Image: *The Vulture and the Little Girl*, Copyright Kevin Carter, 1993 (Stephen Walton, 2023)

After Kevin Carter passed away, many people contributed to their tribute in many ways. In 1996, the Welsh band recorded about Kevin Carter while Jessica Ruby Simpson and Martin Simpson sang a song 'Kevin Carter' and in 2004. The next is contributed by Masha Hamilton, who narrated Kevin Carter as a courageous journalist in her novel and many more who emphasized Kevin Carter in their work (FamousPhotographers.net, 2018).

Many researchers also did their research related to the photography of Kevin Carter, such as Kim & Kelly (2013) did their research on the reactions to Kevamine photo ; Yeong (2014) who discussed 'Our Failure of Empathy'; Canceran (2014) examined the intersection of aesthetics and ethics in discourse related to Kevin Carter's photo of the child and a vulture; and Geurts (2015) reviewed how such a 'social' focus on photography.

The previous research mentioned was not connected to the appraisal system, so this research conducted is related to a part of appraisal namely attitudinal meaning. The attitudinal meaning in this research describes: 1) the affect found in Kevin Carter's suicide note, 2) the judgment discovered in Kevin Carter's suicide note, and 3) the appreciation initiated in Kevin Carter's suicide note.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Language plays an important role in forensic linguistic analysis. Forensic linguistics is defined as a study of the language of the law, Olsson (2008) argued that "What is Forensic Linguistics' is to consider it as the application of linguistics to legal questions and issues" (Olsson, 2008). In our life, forensic linguistics is also needed to help us as an instrument to correct miscarriages of justice (Olsson & Luchjenbroers, 2013).

Linguistics is defined as the study of language. Forensic Linguistics (FL) is considered one of the applied linguistics sciences since it is an application of linguistic understanding of legal discourse or some evidence (Sujatna & Sujatna, 2020). This study also implies the application of scientific knowledge to language in the criminal and law contexts (Ariani et al., 2014; Sujatna & Sobarna, 2021). Many studies related to forensic linguistics such as Fata et al. (2021) examined the linguistic features' characteristics in suicide notes (Fata et al., 2021); Sawirman and Ridhani (2020) studied four famous people's suicide notes based on transitivity (Sawirman & Ridhwani, 2020); Sujatna and Sujatna (2020) explored the processes in the Kurt Cobain's suicide note (Sujatna & Sujatna, 2020). In this study, the present writers focus on suicide notes as the main source of the data. A suicide note is outlined as a written left message by a person who will commit suicide or will intend to commit suicide. Kevin Carter's suicide note as the main source of this research was found on the passenger seat beneath a knapsack in his red truck (Macleod, 2001).

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is determined as one of the approaches in Linguistics (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This approach was introduced by M. A. K. Halliday in his well-known book 'An Introduction to Functional Grammar' in 1985 (Gerot & Wignell, 1995). The book has been revised, the first revision was in 1994 and he did the second revision in 2004 with his colleague, M.I.M. Matthiessen (Thompson, 2014). SFL concerns three metafunctions, they are textual, ideational, and interpersonal and they are used based on how people use the language.

The appraisal system is part of interpersonal metafunction and Martin et al. (2021) named it interpersonal grammar that concerns two main things, namely negotiation and appraisal (Martin et al., 2021). According to Martin and White (2005) and Martin and Rose (2007) in Sukma (2018) and Sujatna (2021), the appraisal system involves three main elements, they are engagement, attitude, and graduation (Martin & Rose, 2007; Martin & White, 2005; Sujatna & Sobarna, 2021; Sukma, 2018). This research focuses on attitudes to evaluate things, people's characters, and their feelings in Kevin Carter's suicide note. The

attitudinal meaning concerned with this research is identified into three different groups: affect that relates to feeling, the judgment that concerns the characters, and appreciation that connects to the value. According to Martin and White (2005) in Ulfah, et al. (2019), emotions, which deal with positive and negative feelings, are the representation of affect. Judgment or ethics are related to attitude toward habits and behavior, such as admiration, criticism, praise, or condemnation. Appreciation is a part of aesthetics, which involves evaluating semiotic and natural phenomena based on their appreciation or disapproval (Ulfah et al., 2019).

Many researches have been done on appraisal, such as evaluative language in Master's thesis defenses in Taiwan universities (Lin & Ken, 2021); multimodal attitude in digital composition (Mills & Stone, 2020); year five students' repertoire of evaluative expression was expanded through a multimodal authoring pedagogy that incorporated the resources described in a linguistic framework and its extrapolation to images (Mills & Unsworth, 2020); a study that uses corpora to analyze the meaning of attitudinal attitudes and social struggles in heavy metal song lyrics (Cheung & Feng, 2019); a specific class of possessive markers in Central Mongolian allows for the expression of subjective and intersubjective stance (Brosig et al., 2018); young Africans' narratives on same-sex attraction and its effects on communication and advocacy efforts, from condemnation to normalization (Winskell et al., 2016); the appraisal system in narrative discourse is viewed from the point of view of writer and reader relationships (Horarik, 2003); evaluative and attitudinal language emerges as part of the interpersonal aspect of language development (Painter, 2003); and evaluating evaluation (Downing, 2002). The following Figure 2 is the figure of a basic system for appraisal.

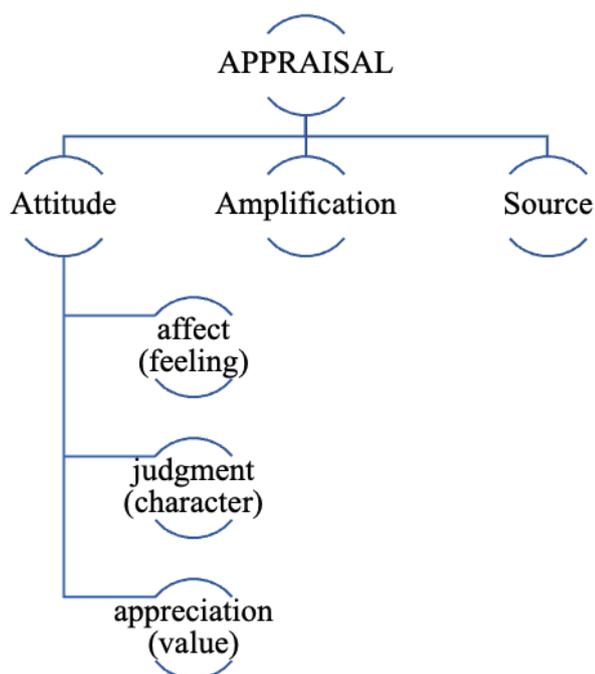


Figure 2.

Adapted from Basic System for Appraisal (Martin & Rose, 2007)

Figure 2 describes the basic system of appraisal, but in this article, the present writers did not involve the second element (amplification) and the third element (source) of the text. The present writers focus on the first element (attitude) that concerns to affect that relates to feeling, judgment that connect to character, and appreciation that associates to value. In the analysis, the adjectives and adverbs that showed the writer's/speaker's evaluative attitude towards what is written or spoken in order to lead the reader/listener are analysed as the

phrase that is referred as the attitude subsystem. Table 1 portrays Sub-types of Appreciation were adapted from Martin & White (2005).

Table 1.
Sub-types of Appreciation
Adapted from (Martin & White, 2005b)

appreciation	mental process type	metafunction
reaction	affection	interpersonal
composition	perception	textual
valuation	cognition	ideational

This research based on appraisal system, especially focusing on attitude which is introduced by Martin & Rose (2007) and Martin & White (2005) to be applied in Kevin Carter's suicide note as the object of the research. Before analyzing the data, the writers also applied some steps in managing the data as described in the research method.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a qualitative research method. The research design was begun with a general statement of the research questions. The research questions came from the present writers' observations and experiences with particular topics, settings, or groups. Firstly, the Carter's suicide note was extracted into clauses; secondly, the extracted clauses were identified as the attitudinal meaning point of view. After collecting the data from the Kevin Carter's suicide note which was obtained from Macleod (2021), thirdly, the present writers observed and classified based on the types of the attitudinal meaning. They were categorized into the three groups: affect that relates to feeling, judgment that concerns to characters, and appreciation that connects to the value. Then the data were analysed and interpreted, and finally they were described and written as the article.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Kevin Carter's suicide note as the source of the data was taken from the article entitled 'The Life and Death of Kevin Carter' which was written by Scott Macleod. The article about Kevin Carter's death was published by TIME on June 24, 2001 in <https://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,165071,00.html>. This suicide note is applied as the main source of the research data. The suicide note of Kevin Carter's is not too long, it contains of 51 words as described in the following:

I'm really, really sorry. The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy does not exist. ...depressed ... without phone ... money for rent ... money for child support ... money for debts ... money!!! ... I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings & corpses & anger & pain ... of starving or wounded children, of trigger-happy madmen, often police, of killer executioners ... I have gone to join Ken if I am that lucky (Macleod, 2001).

From the collected data, then they were identified based on attitudinal meaning point of view related to *affect*, *judgment*, and *appreciation* analyses.

Table 2.
Affect in Kevin Carter's Suicide Note

	Affect	
	describing participant	attributed to participant
as quality	1	6
as process	5	

Table 3.
Judgment in Kevin Carter’s Suicide Note

Judgment	
negative condemns in social sanction	2

Table 4.
Appreciation in Kevin Carter’s Suicide Note

Appreciation	
	1

Table 5.
GDP per capita – Sudan & World
(Source: Adapted from (*GDP per Capita (Current US\$) - Sudan, 2022*))

Year	GDP per capita (current US\$)	
	Sudan	World
1990	\$ 1,312	\$ 4,314.3
1991	\$ 1,668.1	\$ 4,426
1992	\$ 260.5	\$ 4,659.5
1993	\$ 320.5	\$ 4,662.8
1994	\$ 449.7	\$ 4,957.6

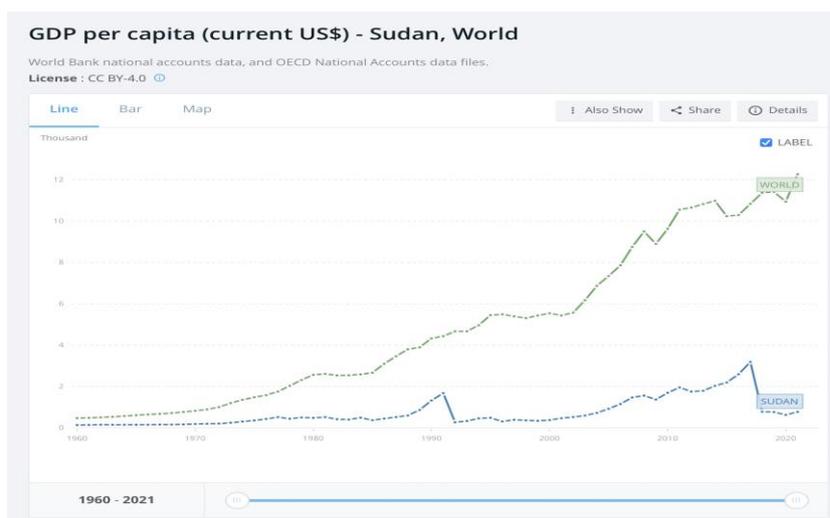


Figure 3.
GDP per capita – Sudan, World
Source: (*GDP per Capita (Current US\$) - Sudan, 2022*)

Table 2-4 describe the elements of attitude found in Kevin Carter’s note while Table 5 and Figure 3 describe GDP per capita – Sudan & World.

Affect in Kevin Carter’s Suicide Note

Affect is one of the three elements of attitude. Positive and negative emotions are involved in achieving the affects. In evaluating the text, the present writers found several data as negative affect described in the following.

- (i) affect as quality
 - describing participant: the **pain** of life
 - attributed to participant: really **sorry, depressed**
- (ii) affect as process: it **does not exist**

In details, the effects are described in the following clauses which were extracted from Kevin Carter's suicide note that was reported by Macleod in 2001 (Macleod, 2001).

(1) *I'm really, really sorry.*

The word *sorry* in the expression (1) was described as the emotion of Kevin Carter 's that expressed the regret of making mistakes. It shows a negative feeling, and it was preceded by the intensifier *really* which was written twice (*really, really sorry*) to emphasize his regret feeling.

(2) *The pain of life overrides the joy to the point...*

The word *pain* in the expression of *the pain of life* in (2) explains the negative feeling of the present writer, in this case, Kevin Carter's feeling. From the expression (2) it was explained that *the joy to the point* is being canceled by *the pain of life*. The phrase of *the pain of life* describes Kevin Carter's feeling that shows he was not happy. The word *pain* also expresses the negative feeling.

(3) ... that joy **does not exist**.

The expression (3) illustrates that *that joy does not exist* means that *the joy to the point* (2) is being cancelled by *the pain of life* in the previous expression (2) so *that joy does not exist* was described in (3).

(4) ...**depressed** ... *without phone*

(5) *money for rent*

(6) *money for child support*

(7) *money for debts*

(8) *money!!!*

Data (4) – (8) are constructed from the part of expression ... *that joy does not exist. ...depressed ... without phone ... money for rent ... money for child support ... money for debts ... money!!!*. Kevin Carter wanted to express his feeling by choosing the word *depressed* to express his deep feeling at that time. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, the word *depressed* is an adjective and it is defined as a) 'low in spirits, especially affected by psychological depression'; and b) 'suffering from mental depression'. Related to the meaning from the dictionary, it was understood that Kevin Carter is low in spirits especially affected by psychological depression to see the people around him. The expression *depressed* is chosen to describe the Kevin Carter's feeling for the time being. It was reported that Sudan situation at that time was in war, the impact of the civil war, telecommunication sector in Sudan remained extremely poor through 1994, pre-privatization era. It was illustrated in the Kevin Carter's note... *depressed... without phone* (4). To illustrate the economic condition in Sudan (1990-1993), the following Table 5 details the GDP per capita Sudan and GDP per capita World in five years 1990-1994 which was reported by World Bank (*GDP per Capita (Current US\$) - Sudan, 2022*). It also shows that the GDP per capita Sudan is far below the GDP per capita World as described in Figure 3 (The GDP 1960-2021).

The data has a close relationship to Kevin Carter's note in data (5) ... *(depressed)... (without) money for rent*, (6) ... *(depressed)... (without) money for child support*, (7) ... *(depressed)... (without) money for debts*, and (8) ... *(depressed)... (without) money!!!* Since the Sudan economy (1990-1994) is not in a good condition at that time, it was illustrated that the Sudanese people in a difficult condition (to describe the situation, Kevin Carter's diction used is *depressed*). It was described that Sudanese people commonly in bad a economic situation, they had difficulties *to pay rent, to support the children, and to pay the debt without money* since they were in crisis.

(9) *I am **haunted** by the vivid memories of killings & corpses & anger & pain*

- (10) *of starving or wounded children,*
(11) *of trigger-happy madmen, often police,*
(12) *of killer executioners*

Data (9) – (12) are assumed to use the same adjective, *haunted*. Data (9) depicts that Kevin Carter (represented by I) is *haunted by the vivid memories of killings & corps & anger & pain*. The word *haunted* in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is an adjective and it is defined as ‘to have a disquieting or harmful effect on trouble’. It was also reported that Kevin Carter witnessed the Church Street Bombing in 1983 in Pretoria and it made him decide to pursue a career in news photography (FamousPhotographers.net, 2018). As the witness of the Church Street Bombing, it also haunted him and it was written in his suicide note in data (9) *I am haunted by the vivid memories of killings & corpses & anger & pain*. Not only the word *haunted*, but also the words *killing*, *corpses*, *anger*, and *pain* are expressed affect as a negative feeling.

In 1993, Sudan gave Kevin Carter an opportunity to travel to South Sudan to report the extreme scarcity of food with the United Nations Operation Lifeline. Along with Kevin Carter’s travel, he shot a starving girl being stalked by a vulture which was published in the first time by ‘The New York Times’ on 26 March 1993. This vivid memory that haunted him was written in his suicide note in data (10) (*I am **haunted** by the vivid memories) of starving or wounded children* as an affect that expresses a negative feeling.

A couple of years after completing his high school, Kevin Carter joined the Air Force. Four years later after joining the Air Force, Kevin Carter tried to protect a mess-hall waiter from being abused and consequently, Kevin Carter was beaten up by the servicemen (FamousPhotographers.net, 2018) and his vivid memories was described in data (11) (*I am **haunted** by the vivid memories) of trigger-happy madmen, often police* and (12) (*I am **haunted** by the vivid memories) of killer executioners* as parts of Kevin Carter’s note which expressed affect which categorized into a negative feeling. Not only that experience mentioned as the background of data (11) and (12) but also the experience in 1980 as the first photographer who shot Maki Skosana a casualty of the death penalty who was suspected in a relationship with a black African police officer in South Africa (FamousPhotographers.net, 2018).

Judgment in Kevin Carter’s Suicide Note

Similar to affect, judgments that relate to character of someone could be positive or negative. Judgment could be differed from personal and moral judgment. The personal judgments are defined as admiration (positive) or criticism (negative) and moral judgment as praise (positive) or condemnation (negative) (Martin & Rose, 2007; Sujatna, 2021). In analysing Kevin Carter’s suicide note, the present writers found several data as judgment (Table 3), as negative condemns in social sanction: **trigger-happy madmen** as described in (11) and **killer executioner** as described in (12).

The word *trigger-happy* in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is an adjective and it is defined as 1) irresponsible in the use of firearms, especially: inclined to shoot before clearly identifying the target, 2) a. ‘inclined to be irresponsible in matters that might precipitate war’ and b. aggressively belligerent in attitude. From the two meanings described the word *trigger-happy* refers to a negative judgment. The second data is the word *killer executioner* and the word *executioner* in Merriam-Webster dictionary is a noun which is defined as ‘one who executes especially one who puts to death’. Related to the Kevin Carter’s experience, it was also reported earlier that Kevin Carter was the photographer who shot Maki Skosana the

victim who was executed in South Africa. The word *executioner* in data (12) also categorized into a negative judgment.

Appreciation in Kevin Carter's Suicide Note

Not only affect and judgment that concern positive and negative, but also an appreciation implies positive and negative evaluation. Suzanne Eggins in Martin and White (2005) suggested the sub-types of appreciation in the Table 1.

Table 4 portrays there is only one data found as appreciation. The data that shows the appreciation taken from Kevin Carter's suicide note is the clause (13) *I have gone to join Ken if I am that lucky*. The word *lucky* in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is an adjective and it is defined as 'having good luck'. Kevin Carter chose the word *lucky* to express his wish to end his life and join with his friend Ken, who had died before him. So, the word *lucky* in the clauses *I have gone to join Ken if I am that luck* could be identified as an appreciation that represents reaction which has a process type (affection) as an interpersonal. Since he felt depressed to see countless murders, stabbings, gunshots, and other barbaric situation, he thought that Ken was a lucky one and he also one as one of the lucky ones.

Ken Oosterbroek was his best friend and he was also one of Bang-Bang Club members. Ken was shot and died at the location when Kevin Carter was being interviewed related to the winning of the Pulitzer Prize. Related to the accident, Kevin Carter felt regret and he also felt that the victim should be him not his best friend, Ken.

CLOSING

This article discusses the attitudinal meaning in the Kevin Carter's suicide note based on appraisal system that rooted from the systemic functional linguistic approach. Related to the aims of the research that describe the attitudinal meaning, it concerns three main things discussed: affect relates to feelings, judgment connects to characters, and appreciation refers to the value. From the data collected, it was reported that the Kevin Carter's suicide note has 51 words in length. Based on the result of the research, firstly, the words *pain* in *the pain of life*, *sorry* in *really sorry*, *depressed* in *depressed*, and *does not exist* in *it does not exist* are categorized into negative affect which showed the negative feeling of the present writers, in this case, the feeling of Kevin Carter in his suicide note.

Secondly, in the Kevin Carter's suicide note, it was also found the words *trigger-happy madmen* in *of trigger-happy madmen*, *often police* and *killer executioner* in *of killer executioners* are classified into judgment as negative condemns in social sanction. Thirdly, the word *lucky* in the clauses *I have gone to join Ken if I am that lucky* is identified as an appreciation that portrays the reaction which has a process type (affection) as an interpersonal. Based on the analysis of the data, as the result of the research, it could be concluded that the Kevin Carter's suicide note indicated the negative attitudinal meaning.

Research often has limitations related to the data used, which is the case with this study. This study only concerned one of the three major elements of appraisal, that is attitude; amplification and source could be studied in the further research. This study describes the use of vocabularies found in the one's suicide note, especially in attitude point of view, that covers affect, judgment, and appreciation.

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