

## Worldview from Balinese Suicide Notes: A Cultural Forensic Linguistic Perspective

Putu Wahyu Widiatmika<sup>1\*</sup> , I Wayan Pastika<sup>2</sup> , Christopher Kinipi<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1,2</sup>Udayana University, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>University of Papua New Guinea, Papua New Guinea

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**Abstract:** Bali, which has the highest suicide rate in Indonesia, provides a critical context for examining suicide notes as both cultural texts and forensic evidence. This study examines how Balinese people communicate finality through language and how these styles relate to authenticity. Five suicide notes, written in Balinese and verified by authorities as genuine, were purposively sampled from online news. Using qualitative content analysis within frameworks of Olsson's Insider and Outsider and Cultural Discourse Analysis, the findings show that authenticity is conveyed indirectly through culturally disciplined language rather than explicit declarations. Finality is predominantly framed through a journey metaphor which reflects Balinese Hindu beliefs. This study contributes to forensic linguistics by demonstrating that authenticity in local suicide notes is inseparable from local cultures and norms.

**Keywords:** authenticity; Balinese; cultural discourse; stylistics; suicide notes

### 1. Introduction

In Bali, where suicide rates are the highest in Indonesia (Pampur, 2025; Putri, 2024; Widyati, 2024), the final words left behind often carry not only personal grief but also echoes of Balinese cultural philosophy and communication style. Data from the Indonesian Criminal Investigation Agency indicate persistent cases across recent years (NusaBali, 2025), yet many suicides occur without prior verbal disclosure as people with suicidal ideation often withdraw socially (Ratih & Tobing, 2016). In this context, suicide notes constitute texts in which victims convey finality through language.

In Bali, such texts can reveal not only the personal stories of victims but also the ways cultural worldviews shape their final messages. These notes may encode broader social and structural issues (Abaalkhail, 2020; Fata et al., 2021;

\* Corresponding author's email: [wahyu\\_widiatmika@unud.ac.id](mailto:wahyu_widiatmika@unud.ac.id)

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Gay, 2025), offering scholars and investigators a deeper understanding of how Balinese people perceive life, death, and obligation. Rather than viewing suicide notes solely as psychological artifacts, this study approaches them as culturally situated discourse.

Previous research on Balinese communication emphasizes indirectness, speech levels, and metaphor as central strategies in polite social interaction (Kardana et al., 2023, 2025; Kardana & Satyawati, 2019). Whether such culturally embedded strategies are retained in suicide notes, texts written under highly emotional circumstances, remains an important question. Understanding these cultural-linguistic markers is crucial not only for cultural studies but also for forensic contexts, where the authenticity of a note may be contested.

Beyond their cultural significance, Balinese suicide notes also hold forensic value as potential evidence in legal investigations. In forensic linguistics, one central debate concerns the distinction between insider language, produced by suicide victims, and outsider language, fabricated to imitate authenticity (Olsson, 2008). The challenge lies in determining whether certain linguistic markers can reliably indicate authenticity, since features such as theme, vocabulary, or structure may be consciously imitated. This issue becomes particularly complex in the Balinese context, where communication is often mediated through indirectness, symbolic metaphors, and speech levels that reflect social hierarchy. Such culturally embedded idioms may not align neatly with universal forensic criteria, raising the question of whether Balinese suicide notes can be analyzed solely through existing frameworks, or whether cultural discourse must be considered alongside linguistic evidence. The authentication of suicide notes remains one of the debated topics in forensic linguistics, primarily due to the challenges in distinguishing authentic notes from fabricated ones. The fabrication of suicide notes presents a significant challenge in forensic investigations, as they can be deliberately used to conceal homicides. In Indonesia, several high-profile cases have involved fake suicide notes, such as the 2022 murder of a sex worker in Surabaya (detikJabar, 2022) and the 2018 homicide of a wife in Bener Meriah (Arsani, 2018), where the perpetrator staged the scene to appear as a suicide. Similar cases have been documented internationally, such as two cases from the United Kingdom (Bardsley, 2022; Shah, 2021). In a culturally diverse country such as Indonesia, fabricated notes may not only mimic linguistic style but also attempt to imitate culturally appropriate expressions, which makes forensic authentication even more complex.

By shifting focus to Balinese-language suicide notes, this study addresses an underexplored area since past studies focused on national and international languages discussing psychological content, genre patterns, and general forensic

markers of authenticity (Grundlingh, 2020; Ioannou & Debowska, 2014; Pastika et al., 2025; Widiatmika et al., 2023, 2024). These studies rarely use data from local languages and consider how local cultural worldviews shape linguistic expressions of finality.

This study addresses these two gaps by using Balinese data and integrating forensic linguistic analysis with Balinese cultural norms. This study investigates authentic Balinese suicide notes to address three central problems: (1) what linguistic features characterize authentic Balinese suicide notes, (2) how the Balinese worldview is reflected in expressions of finality, and (3) how cultural norms influence linguistic markers of authenticity. This study is expected to reveal how the Balinese worldview shapes expressions of finality, identify distinctive linguistic features of authentic suicide notes, and demonstrate how cultural norms influence markers of authenticity. The implications of this study extend to both enhancing forensic linguistic methods for suicide note authentication and deepening the understanding of Balinese cultural communication in moments of finality.

## 2. Literature Review

Academicians have increasingly turned to linguistic analysis to distinguish between authentic and fabricated suicide notes. Prior studies have examined lexical, syntactic, and semantic features, such as pronoun usage, verb tense, and emotional tone, to identify patterns indicative of authenticity or fabrication. The study by Maharani et al. (2022) revealed that linguistic features of suicide notes, covering clear reasoning, emotional expression, text structure, grammar, and punctuation, were present, with clear reasoning most frequently appearing as background information justifying the suicidal act. The emotions expressed in the suicide notes predominantly included fear of life and despair. Shapero (2011) identified linguistic differences between authentic and fabricated suicide notes: fabricated notes displayed excessive use of names, unusual phrase structures, inconsistent meanings, and unnatural expressions of sorrow, while authentic notes typically conveyed messages about affection, future perspectives, family, and personal knowledge.

Although there have been studies stating that these linguistic features are relevant as investigative tools, there are scholars who disagree (Grundlingh, 2020; Osgood & Walker, 1959), particularly when the influence of local culture has not been considered. This disagreement stems from the inherent complexity of suicide notes, which often contain deeply personal and idiosyncratic language that may overlap with intentionally constructed imitations. In Bali, this complexity is heightened by cultural conventions of communication, where indirectness, speech levels, and metaphorical language are deeply embedded

in daily interaction (Arnawa et al., 2025; Kardana, 2022). Such features may not only complicate the forensic authentication process but also provide valuable insight into Balinese perspectives on life, death, and interpersonal relationships. Consequently, the validity of linguistic analysis in forensic contexts continues to be contested, and culturally grounded empirical research becomes increasingly necessary to establish more definitive criteria.

In response to this ongoing debate, previous studies have examined suicide notes across multiple languages, including English (Shapero, 2011), Indonesian (Widiatmika et al., 2024), and Korean (Lee & Joh, 2019), to identify consistent linguistic indicators of authenticity. However, findings have been inconsistent, with some studies supporting the reliability of specific markers (Olsson, 2008) while others highlight their susceptibility to manipulation (Grundlingh, 2020). This inconsistency suggests that linguistic features vary significantly across cultural and linguistic contexts, which hampers the universality of proposed authentication methods. Pastika et al. (2025) stressed that four specific authentic expressions, which are suicidal proposition, expression of suicide as the only option, reference to death, and emotional ambivalence, are more definitive compared to other expressions since the latter are subject to fabrication after comparing suicide notes from eight different countries.

This raises the question of whether regional differences within the same country yield distinct patterns. This is what current study inspects. In the Balinese context, suicide notes may carry expressions rooted in local cosmology, such as metaphors of a journey to reflect transition into the afterlife, or references to spiritual harmony and family obligations. These culturally embedded markers may appear distinct from linguistic features found in global studies. To contribute to this discussion, the present study analyzes authentic Balinese suicide notes by focusing on the identification of distinctive linguistic markers that bridge both forensic and cultural dimensions.

While research to determine authenticity of suicide notes from forensic linguistic perspective is gaining popularity in national and international scopes, research on the same topic in Bali is absent. Studies on suicide in Bali are limited to explore the psychological factors in driving suicidal ideation (Agestin et al., 2025; Ningsih, 2024; Ratih & Tobing, 2016). Other studies explored suicide methods (Asih & Lesmana, 2019; Sudhita, 2010). No prior study has examined suicide notes in Bali through both a forensic and cultural discourse lens. Therefore, there is a big research gap that current study can fill from textual analysis to analyze cultural and forensic significance.

Studying suicides in Bali is rarely done by cultural studies. The closest research are about social dynamics that to certain extent can trigger suicides, for example modern Balinese social relationships, which were once more communal

and open, have become increasingly exclusive (Kamajaya & Nugroho, 2020). This shift contributes to weakening social support structures and heightens feelings of isolation, especially among individuals already experiencing distress. Stress itself has been identified as a significant predictor of suicidal ideation, with gradual and persistent stress conditions escalating the likelihood of such thoughts (Wicaksana et al., 2024).

Negative self-perception is another recurring factor, particularly among Balinese adult men (Ratih & Tobing, 2016). Social expectations placed upon men from birth, including responsibilities as providers and protectors, create strong inward pressures that may become overwhelming when coupled with weakened social bonds (Sartini, 2020). Acts of suicide are often viewed by the public as shameful (Sasmita & Winiantari, 2024) compounding the burden of stigma faced by individuals contemplating or attempting it. For unmarried Balinese women, this stigma is further reinforced by loneliness and negative perceptions of their social status (Prahasasgita & Lestari, 2025).

Socioeconomic and domestic factors also play a central role. Financial hardship and unfortunate economic backgrounds increase vulnerability (Er et al., 2023; Jain et al., 2024; Wahidin & Simbolon, 2025), while domestic violence, both physical and psychological, has been consistently linked to suicidal behavior among women (Ariyanti & Ardhana, 2020; Davarinejad et al., 2025; Turnbull et al., 2025). Religious obligations, when coupled with economic strain, can create additional pressures for Balinese families, further exacerbating social vulnerability (Parmini, 2015). Recent research has documented that reasons for suicide in Bali often involve a combination of personal, relational, and structural pressures (Sumarkandia, 2024). Together, these studies reveal that suicide in Bali is not solely a matter of individual psychology but is deeply entangled with cultural expectations, gender norms, economic precarity, and shifting patterns of social life. The results of these studies raise an interesting question whether Balinese suicide notes reveal these worrying problems.

In Balinese communication, persuasion and expression are often mediated through figurative language, indirection, and cultural notions of hierarchy. Skilled speakers may employ *makulit* 'veiled' or *wayah* 'sophisticated' circumlocutions, where the intended meaning is not immediately obvious but resonates with culturally attuned audiences (Hobart, 2019). This indirect style reflects a broader communicative pattern in Bali, where what a speaker hopes to achieve may differ from how an audience interprets the message. In ritual and political contexts, persuasion can take the form of appeals to pathos, ethos, or logos, yet always filtered through culturally specific idioms and hierarchical relations.

The above communication conventions are relevant to suicide notes,

where Balinese may similarly adopt metaphor, allegory, or veiled expressions to communicate despair, obligation, or farewell. Instead of blunt declarations, Balinese notes may frame finality through symbolic journeys, references to spiritual balance, or appeals to family responsibility, aligning with cultural norms of respectful and indirect speech. Taken together, this review highlights the necessity of examining Balinese suicide notes not only as forensic evidence but also as cultural texts that encode local worldviews and social pressures.

### 3. Method and Theory

#### 3.1 Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015) in combination with Cultural Discourse Analysis (Carbaugh, 2007) to examine linguistic patterns in Balinese suicide notes. Content analysis provides a systematic way of identifying forensic linguistic markers at lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels, while Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) allows the study to capture how culturally specific forms of communication, such as indirectness, speech levels, and metaphor, shape the way suicide is articulated in writing. The combination of these approaches ensures both analytic rigor and cultural sensitivity.

The data consist of five authentic suicide notes, sourced from verified online news reports (Bali Factual News, 2023; Gunarta, 2021; Media Pelangi, 2021; Suadnyana, 2022; Suarna, 2021). Notes were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) official verification by Balinese authorities as authentic suicide cases, (2) Balinese authorship, and (3) composition in the Balinese language. Although the data are limited, each note is culturally loaded with linguistic expressions and discourse patterns of finality, which can be examined in detail to uncover patterned and established worldviews as aimed by this study. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the victims and their families, all names mentioned in the data have been anonymized and replaced with initials. Figures showing suicide notes have blurred parts as censorship to the private information of the victim. Because of the sensitive nature of suicide notes, the study relied only on publicly available materials and interpreted them with caution.

The analysis applied Olsson's (2008, 2012) Insider–Outsider language framework to identify established forensic markers of authenticity, such as reasoning, expressions of ambivalence, reference to death, and farewell messages. To extend beyond universal forensic criteria, CuDA was then applied to focus on communicative practices embedded in Balinese discourse. Following CuDA's analytical process, the study examined: (1) cultural terms used in the notes, (2) cultural propositions and norms communicated through these terms, and (3) interpretive premises underlying the terms and propositions.

The analytical process started with segmenting and coding the notes for forensic linguistic markers of authenticity. Next, through CuDA categories, the data were further analyzed to find recurring cultural discourses and symbolic expressions. Cross-comparison across the five notes was conducted to establish patterns at both the micro-linguistic level (lexical and syntactic choices) and the macro-discursive level (themes, cultural values, and communicative purposes). This dual-layer analysis highlights both forensic indicators and culturally distinctive ways of communicating finality.

### 3.2 Theory

This study is grounded in two theoretical frameworks. The first is Insider and Outsider language by Olsson (2008, 2012) to answer the first question. The second is Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) by Carbaugh (2007) to answer the second question. Then, both theories are used to answer the third question.

Insider language reveals the cognitive and emotional state of suicidal individuals, who often feel trapped in their circumstances with no perceived escape (Olsson, 2012). Metaphorically, Olsson describes this mindset as akin to being confined in a solitary bunker during wartime, isolated and unable to communicate except through the suicide note itself. Key features of insider language include frequent expressions of love and apologies, which are rarely present in outsider language (Olsson, 2012). Authentic notes also contain compliments directed at surviving loved ones, particularly those who may have struggled with similar suicidal thoughts. Additionally, victims often articulate their inability to endure life any longer, confess to feelings of guilt regarding past actions or deteriorating health, and express ambivalent emotions, simultaneously praising and blaming the same individuals while oscillating between apologies and declarations of intolerance.

Another hallmark of insider language is its preoccupation with death, often explicitly referenced in authentic notes (Olsson, 2012). Victims may also describe profound exhaustion, efforts to appease family members, and include directive statements instructing survivors on how to proceed after their death. These linguistic patterns reflect the internal turmoil and conflicted emotions characteristic of individuals contemplating or committing suicide.

In contrast, outsider language is a language style of fabricated suicide notes that comes not from individuals with suicidal ideation. The style is constructed from how society in general perceives suicide and assumes what it feels like to have suicidal ideation (Olsson, 2012). Outsider language in fabricated suicide notes often employs pejorative labels such as *crazy*, *weak*, or *cowardly*, terms that typically originate from the reactions of family members or investigators rather than the victim (Olsson, 2012). Unlike authentic notes, fabricated ones

seldom include heartfelt expressions of love or affection toward family and friends (Olsson, 2012). Instead, they frequently assign blame to external parties or circumstances, reflecting an outward focus rather than the introspective quality of insider language. The absence of authentic emotional depth and the presence of inconsistent or unnatural phrasing further distinguish outsider language, making it a critical indicator of potential fabrication in forensic analysis.

CuDA as articulated by Carbaugh (2007) provides a framework for examining how communication practices embody and express cultural meanings. CuDA views discourse as a site where culture is both performed and interpreted, emphasizing that linguistic choices are not merely stylistic but reveal deeper cultural values, social norms, and worldview. Central to CuDA is the analytical process of identifying cultural terms, cultural propositions, and cultural premises expressed in communication, and linking these to the social functions they serve.

In practical terms, CuDA guides this study through three interrelated concepts. First are cultural terms, words or phrases rich with local meaning that signal identity, relationships, feelings, acting, or dwelling (Carbaugh, 2007). In Balinese suicide notes, such terms include metaphors of a journey or references to the *sekala* 'seen' and *niskala* 'unseen' realms, which are culturally loaded expressions of transition and balance. When these terms combine into statements, they form cultural propositions, the second concept, which articulate explicit beliefs or values, for instance, the idea that death is a passage into another realm. Underlying these are cultural premises, which belong to the third concept. They are the implicit assumptions that do not need to be stated because they are part of shared cultural common sense, such as the religious teaching behind the cultural practices. CuDA also highlights the norms of expression shaping how these terms are used, such as the Balinese preference for veiled (*makulit*) or respectful phrasing rather than blunt declarations.

Integrating CuDA with forensic linguistic analysis enhances the study's ability to distinguish genuine linguistic features from fabricated ones. Whereas forensic frameworks such as Olsson's Insider–Outsider model emphasize markers of authenticity across languages, CuDA situates these markers within culturally specific communicative traditions. This dual perspective enables the present study to account for both universal forensic indicators and Balinese cultural idioms, thus bridging authenticity and worldview in the analysis of suicide notes.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the five Balinese suicide notes reveals a complex interplay between linguistic markers of authenticity and culturally embedded ways of expressing finality. The findings are organized into three thematic areas that directly correspond to the study’s research questions. First, addressing the question of what linguistic features characterize authentic Balinese suicide notes. The analysis identifies recurring lexical, syntactic, and discursive patterns consistent with forensic criteria of authenticity. Second, in response to the question of how the Balinese worldview is reflected in expressions of finality, the notes are examined for culturally grounded representations of death, responsibility, and closure. Finally, addressing how cultural norms influence linguistic markers of authenticity, the analysis considers how Balinese Hindu cultures and beliefs are translated in the markers.

##### 4.1 Linguistic Features of Authentic Balinese Suicide Notes

Based on five authentic suicide notes (SN-1 to SN-5), there are 10 linguistic features found. The list of the features can be seen on the breakdown of analysis below. The missing features are a) expression of suicide as the only option, b) emotional ambivalence, and c) expression of praising others.

###### 4.1.1 Suicidal Proposition

The first feature is suicidal proposition. It speaks the suicidal intention that leads to committing suicide as seen on Table 1. As Olsson (2008) said, such proposition is related to the action of suicide. The characteristics are unambiguous, thematic, and simple in terms of syntactic construction.

Table 1. Expressions using Life as A Journey Metaphor as Suicidal Propositions

No. Data	Data	Source
1	<i>Mungkin pejalan Pak tuah amone</i> ‘Perhaps my journey is only up to this point’	SN-1
2	<i>Pak mejalan dengan tenang</i> ‘I left peacefully’	SN-1
3	<i>Tiang mejalan</i> ‘I left’	SN-1
4	<i>A luas joh</i> ‘I went far away’	SN-2
5	<i>A luas malu nah</i> ‘I am going now’	SN-2
6	<i>A luas malu</i> ‘I am going now’	SN-2
7	<i>A luas malu Pak</i> ‘I am going, Dad’	SN-2

Source: Research Data

The dataset being thematic means that the proposition contains the idea of committing suicide. The seven data above show that committing suicide is the point that the victims would like to tell. Although there is no explicit lexical

presence of the word 'suicide', the word choices of *jalan* 'walk' and *luas* 'go' represent suicide through conceptual metaphor of life as a journey.

All data in Table 1 show a strong thematic unity, which is the idea of departure. Data (1) *Mungkin pejalan Pak tuah amone* 'Perhaps my journey is only up to this point' and data (2) *Pak mejalan dengan tenang* 'I left peacefully' and consistently reinforce the concept of life ending as a natural conclusion to a personal journey. The notes maintain a coherent narrative arc in which death is portrayed as a continuation of the self's trajectory. This thematic consistency not only satisfies Olsson's second criterion but also reflects the collective cultural conceptualization of death among Balinese people.

According to the dataset as seen on Table 1, the data found demonstrate a clear and direct association between the subject and the act of leaving life. Data (3) *Tiang mejalan* 'I left' and data (4) *A luas joh* 'I went far away' represent active statements without ambiguity or hesitation. Active construction in syntax represents volitionality, which means the agent is conscious in performing the verb. Therefore, the syntax of these data suits the definition of suicidal proposition feature. This clarity of intention fulfills Olsson's first criterion of unambiguous suicidal propositions, strengthening the authenticity of the notes.

The syntactic structures employed in these utterances are without complexity. Data (3) *Tiang mejalan* 'I left' has S-V and data (6) *A luas malu* 'I am going now' has S-V-Adv. There is a notable absence of complex syntax, such as subordinate clauses or extended elaboration. This syntactic simplicity is consistent with Olsson's observation that authentic suicide notes often emerge from intense emotional strain, which results in straightforward and minimally adorned expressions.

In Bali, suicide is not understood solely as an individual psychological act but is embedded within broader cultural frameworks concerning harmony, moral responsibility, and cosmological order (Yasa & Adisastra, 2025). Balinese concepts about life are based on cycles taught by Hindu beliefs like *Tri Kona*, the life cycle (Wiratmaja et al., 2021), and *Samsara*, the journey of life (Teng, 2024), which translates to the concept of journey. Hence, verbalization of suicide is packaged in this implicit manner. This contrasts with findings from studies of suicide notes in national and international languages, where explicit references to death are often present (Olsson, 2008; Pastika et al., 2025). Therefore, implicit manner might be found dominantly in local languages, which mostly consider suicide as taboo (Keller et al., 2019). (Olsson, 2008; Pastika et al., 2025).

#### 4.1.2 Proposition Directed to Recipient

In Olsson's (2008) framework, authentic suicide notes function primarily as acts of communication directed from the victims to specific recipients. A

central feature of this communication is the proposition directed to the recipient, which should reflect the relationship between the victims and the addressee.

In Balinese suicide notes, address terms are an important linguistic indicator of this communication since Balinese acknowledges the social relationship between individuals tied by the belief of Tri Rna, the three debts (Aditi et al., 2023). However, in the dataset analyzed, a notable pattern emerges: while explicit address terms are sometimes used, other utterances convey recipient-directed propositions through imperatives and elliptical constructions, where the recipient is present but unwritten as seen on Table 2.

Table 2. Expressions using Interlocutor Reference and Imperative Suffix *-ang*

No. Data	Data	Source
8	<i>Ma, Pak minta maaf sebelumnya</i> ‘Honey, I am sorry’	SN-1
9	<i>G runguang mama nah de kaline nyen mama</i> ‘Son, take care of mommy, do not leave her’	SN-1
10	<i>Y runguang mama nah</i> ‘Y, take care of mommy’	SN-1
11	<i>Bapak, A luas joh</i> ‘Dad, i am going far’	SN-2
12	<i>Bapak de sebet</i> ‘Dad, do not be sad’	SN-2
13	<i>T bli ngidih pelih</i> ‘T, I ask for forgiveness’	SN-3
14	<i>Sinang purang tiyang Pak</i> ‘I am sorry, Sir’	SN-3
15	<i>WD, Maaf nah wii, tu pelih, tu curang</i> ‘W, I am sorry, I was wrong, I was dishonest’	SN-4
16	<i>Men WY mati melahang ajak panake</i> ‘If I die, take good care of the children’	SN-5

Source: Research Data

Several examples in the dataset display direct address to the recipient using personal or kinship terms to establish relational proximity. Data (8) until (15) contains address terms of *Ma*, *Gus*, *Y* (a clipped term for the full name), *Bapak*, *T* (a clipped term for the full name), *Wii*. These terms serve multiple functions such as indications of social relationships, personalization of messages, and social roles establishment. This personalization through address terms strongly fulfills Olsson’s requirement that propositions must indicate the victim’s relational world to enhance the authenticity of the note. Based on the dataset on Table 2, it is evident that there is power-dynamics. Victims who were parents gave commands to their children. Similarly, victims who were husbands also provided similar theme to the wives.

Interestingly, in some parts of the dataset, the recipient is not overtly mentioned by name, but the imperative verb form reveals that the proposition is clearly directed toward someone as shown in data (16). Although the sentence does not specify who should take care of the children, the imperative unambiguously implies the presence of a specifically-intended recipient. Based

on the word ‘children’, it is assumed that the victim and the addressee are married as they have parental roles. This type of elliptical construction reflects a shared context between the victim and the recipient, where the speaker assumes that the addressee will understand who is being instructed without needing explicit naming.

#### 4.1.3 Words Less than 300

One of the measurable linguistic features that supports the authenticity of suicide notes is brevity. Olsson (2008) emphasizes that authentic suicide notes are typically short as they are often written under psychological strain with a focus on delivering essential messages rather than elaborate narratives. The emotional and cognitive conditions under which suicide notes are composed generally result in concise texts with word counts rarely exceeding 300 words as seen on Table 3.

Table 3. Number of Words in Chosen Suicide Notes

Source	No. of Words
SN-1	121
SN-2	113
SN-3	73
SN-4	88
SN-5	29

Source: Research Data

The consistent brevity across all five notes reflects the psychological reality behind suicide note writing. Under emotional distress, individuals tend to favor simple, economical communication, focusing on the most important themes: expressing love, requesting forgiveness, giving final instructions, and making personal farewells. The notes do not attempt to narrate complex stories or detailed justifications; instead, they maintain a focused and urgent tone.

Despite their limited length, the notes effectively fulfill core communicative purposes. The five suicide notes share common emotional elements, including guilt, remorse, expression of love for family, and hopelessness. Despite their brevity, ranging from 29 to 121 words, each note effectively conveys profound emotional states and the writer’s intentions. The emotional arcs typically begin with an apology, followed by self-reflection, acknowledgment of suffering, and end with a final farewell or desire. This concise structure allows the victims to communicate their feelings in a focused and direct manner.

The brevity of these notes enhances their emotional impact as the lack of excess words creates a sense of urgency and finality. By condensing their

emotions into a few short statements, the victims convey clarity and finality. This brevity also reflects a sense of emotional exhaustion, where the writer may feel they can no longer bear the weight of their suffering, leaving only essential expressions of regret, love, and the desire to end the pain. Thus, the brevity of these notes serves not only as a linguistic feature but also as an emotional strategy.

#### 4.1.4 *Obscure Context*

The five suicide notes analyzed present a significant amount of obscure context, which is a common feature in authentic suicide notes (Olsson, 2008). While suicide notes are often clear in their intent, they may lack specific reasons behind the act; hence, the context is often implicit and obscure. In the notes this study collected, the victims fail to explicitly state the precise motivations for their decision to end their lives. Instead, they focus on emotional expressions such as guilt, love, and apology. Obscure context, while a recognized feature of authentic suicide notes, is culturally inflected in Balinese texts through norms of indirectness and taboo topic.

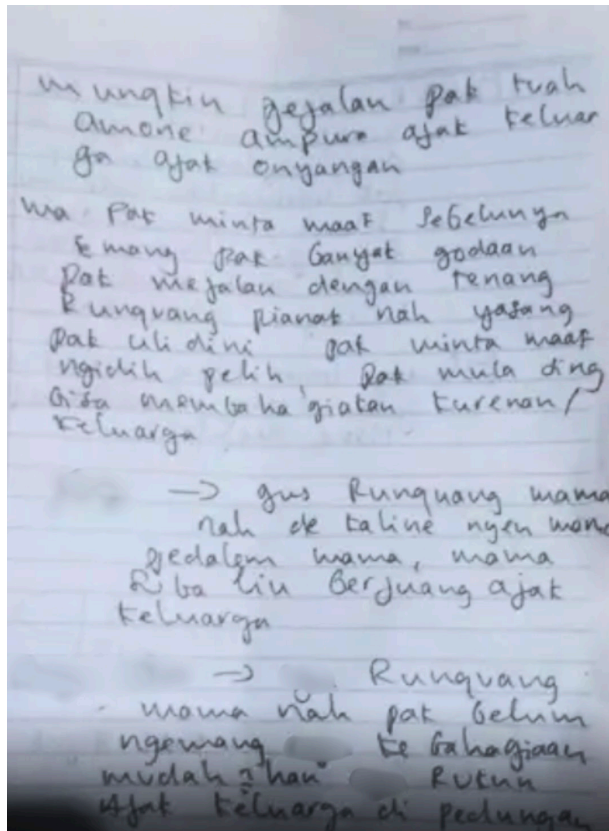


Figure 1. Visual excerpt of SN-1 with private information such as names is blurred (Source: Media Pelangi, 2021)

The first note as seen on Figure 1 reveals a deep sense of guilt and remorse, yet it does not provide any direct explanation for the writer’s actions. The note suggests that the victim is aware of family struggles, but the specific cause of their pain or their decision to die is not explained. Similarly, the second note, while emotionally charged, lacks clear explanation for the victim’s decision to take their life. The writer expresses regret and love for the family, especially the father, but the actual reasons behind the decision to end their life are not mentioned.

The third note as seen on Figure 2, much like the previous ones, focuses on guilt, but it lacks concrete reasons why the victim needed to end life. One example from SN-3 is *Beli be jelek, tuah dadi beban keluarga, Bli anak beles T, Bli anak ngendah, Hidup bli sia-sia T, Bli be kadong gagal* ‘I am not good enough and I am the burden of the family, I am a fool, I am ill-mannered, my life is a waste, I am already a failure’. While this example powerfully conveys guilt and perceived moral inadequacy, it provides no explicit account of the events or circumstances leading to the decision to die. Meaning is constructed through accumulated self-deprecation rather than causal narration; hence, the context is obscure. The fourth note exhibits a similar pattern of emotional expression without clarity. Although there is a hint of issue between husband and wife, it is still obscure since the statement of the issue is very subtle. The fifth note being the shortest also demonstrates obscure context without any reason underlying the suicide act.

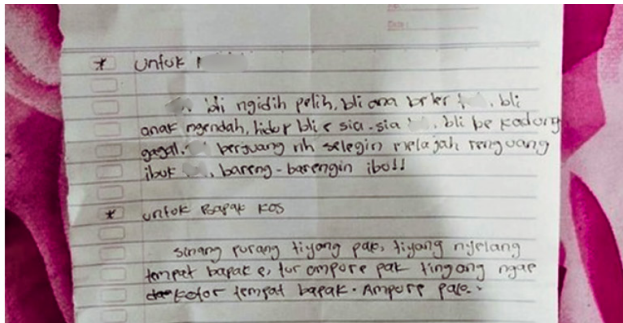


Figure 2. Visual excerpt of SN-3 with private information such as names is blurred (Source: Suadnyana, 2022)

#### 4.1.5 Apology

In the dataset as seen on Table 4, we can observe a recurring pattern of apology expressions that align with the guilt and self-blame often seen in authentic suicide notes. The notes convey deep remorse but lack clear explanations for the specific reasons behind the apology, which results in an obscure context for each case.

Table 4. Expressions using the Word *Ampura* and its synonyms

No. Data	Data	Source
17	<i>Ampura ajak keluarga ajak onyangan</i> 'I am sorry to all of my family'	SN-1
18	<i>Ma, Pak minta maaf sebelumnya</i> 'Honey, I am sorry'	SN-1
19	<i>Pak minta maaf ngidih pelih</i> 'I am sorry I was wrong'	SN-1
20	<i>Pak minta maaf sawireh Pak sing ngidang nyalanan hidup biin</i> 'I am sorry as I cannot live anymore'	SN-1
21	<i>Keluarga besar tiang meme lan guru tiang nunas ampura tiang mejalan</i> 'to my family, mother, and mentor, I am sorry I left'	SN-1
22	<i>T, bli ngidih pelih</i> 'T, I ask for forgiveness'	SN-3
23	<i>Sinang purang tiyang Pak, tiyang nyelang tempat bapak e</i> 'Forgive me, Sir, I used your place'	SN-3
24	<i>Tur ampura Pak tiang ngae kotor tempat bapak.</i> 'Also forgive me because I made your place dirty'	SN-3
25	<i>Ampura Pak</i> 'I am sorry, Sir'	SN-3
26	<i>Sinampure... tyang sing ngidang nutugang ngayahin bapak ajak emek</i> 'I am sorry, I cannot serve Dad and Mom anymore'	SN-4
27	<i>Emek minta maaf yang sebesar-besar ne</i> 'I deeply apologize'	SN-4
28	<i>Maaf nah wii, tu pelih, tu curang</i> 'I am sorry wii, I was wrong, I was dishonest'	SN-4
29	<i>Sinampurang sareng sami</i> 'please forgive me all'	SN-4

Source: Research Data

According to the dataset as displayed on Table 4, the apology in each note serves as an expression of the writer's guilt, yet the lack of specific reasons for the apology leaves the context unclear and obscure. This aligns with the characteristic feature of authentic suicide notes, where the emotional turmoil and self-blame of the writer are central, but the cause of the distress remains unstated. The repeated expressions of regret without detailed context reflect the internalized guilt often present in suicide notes, where the writer's emotional burden is conveyed, but the details behind their feelings are left unsaid.

The apology is often associated with the option of committing suicide. However, there are also other reasons why the victims apologize, which depends on their conditions. Data (23) shows that the victim was sorry because he committed suicide not in the place he owned. This is very much related to Balinese cultural value that suicide is a wrongdoing and is believed to make the surrounding energy negative or dirty as the victim said. Data (28) shows that apology is conveyed to confess and provide testimony.

#### 4.1.6 Expression of Love

The dataset as seen on Table 5 reveals a significant expression of love that aligns with the feature of proposition directed to the recipient in authentic suicide notes. These expressions are integral to the message the victims wish to convey, as they often represent the victims' final emotional communication with their loved ones (Olsson, 2008). Therefore, the expression of love is the content, while proposition directed to recipients is the technical realization.

Table 5. Expressions Showing Love

No. Data	Data	Source
30	<i>A sayang bapak, jak konyang</i> 'A loves Dad and all'	SN-2
31	<i>A sayang bapak, jak kak, jak memek D, jak kluarge mekejang</i> 'A loves dad, grandpa, aunt D, and all family'	SN-2
32	<i>Emek sayang KALIAN</i> 'Mom loves you all'	SN-4

Source: Research Data

The expression of love in these notes is a key component of the proposition directed to the recipient, serving as the core message the victims aim to leave behind. This emotional communication underscores the personal relationship between the victim and their loved ones, often reinforcing the sense of guilt and self-blame in the victims' minds. While these expressions of affection are clear, the absence of detailed context or reasons for the suicide further contributes to the unclear context of the notes. Ultimately, these expressions of love are a critical linguistic feature that shows the victims' desire to leave a final emotional message for those they love, despite the lack of clarity around the reasons behind their actions.

#### 4.1.7 Reference of Death

The dataset as seen on Table 6 reveals recurring references to death, which strongly aligns with the feature of death reference in authentic suicide notes. These references serve as direct indicators that the victim has contemplated suicide, as they explicitly refer to their own death or the concept of dying. In authentic suicide notes, the recursive mention of death intensifies the victim's expressed desire to end their life, further solidifying the act of suicide as the central theme.

Table 6. Expressions of Death Reference

No. Data	Data	Source
33	<i>Mungkin pejalan Pak tuah amone</i> 'Perhaps my journey is only up to this point'	SN-1
34	<i>Mani yen suba Pak tenang</i> 'When I soon to be in peace'	SN-1
35	<i>Orin tunangan A ne nglokin A pak tepuk ne terakhir kali</i> 'Please tell my girlfriend to see me for the last time'	SN-2
36	<i>Tiang ngae kotor tempat bapak</i> 'I made your place dirty'	SN-3
37	<i>Men WY mati melahang ajak panake</i> 'If I die, take good care of the children'	SN-5
38	<i>Men WY mati adepo darane</i> 'If I die, just sell the birds'	SN-5

Source: Research Data

The references to death in these notes serve as direct and clear indicators that the victims are contemplating suicide. The recursive mention of death reinforces the victim’s desire to end their life and highlights the finality of their decision. These references not only show the victims’ thoughts of death but also illustrate their emotional state and the practical concerns they may have regarding the consequences of their death. The frequent allusions to death strengthen the understanding that these suicide notes are authentic, as they clearly communicate the victims’ intention and emotional burden before the act.

#### 4.1.8 Self-blaming

In forensic linguistic studies of suicide notes, self-blaming has been widely recognized as a hallmark of authenticity. Olsson (2012) emphasizes that authentic suicide notes frequently contain explicit negative self-evaluations, expressions of guilt, and a strong sense of being a burden to others. In the dataset of Balinese suicide notes examined, these linguistic features of self-blaming emerge consistently, supporting the authenticity of the texts.

Table 7. Expressions of Defiling Oneself

No. Data	Data	Source
39	<i>Pak mula sng bisa membahagiakan kurenan/keluarga</i> 'I cannot provide happiness for my wife/family'	SN-1
40	<i>Beli be jelek, tuah dadi beban keluarga</i> 'I am not good enough and I am the burden of the family' <i>Bli anak beler T</i> 'I am a fool' <i>Bli anak ngendah</i> 'I am ill-mannered' <i>Hidup bli sia-sia T</i> 'my life is a waste' <i>Bli be kadong gagal</i> 'I am already a failure'	SN-3
41	<i>Tu be pelih pejalan</i> 'I have taken the wrong route'	SN-4
42	<i>WY hidup masih sing ngidang megae ngudiyang</i> 'I still cannot do anything even if I continue living'	SN-5

Source: Research Data

The first key pattern observed from the dataset as seen on Table 7 is the pervasive use of negative self-evaluation. Several notes explicitly label the self with terms denoting incompetence or moral failure. For instance, expressions such as data (40) *Beli be jelek* ‘I am not good enough’ and *Bli anak beles T* ‘I am a fool’ illustrate a direct linguistic construction of the self as inadequate and defective. These phrases reflect a core psychological component of suicide ideation, which is perceived burdensomeness.

This burdensomeness also surfaces, both explicitly and implicitly, within the dataset. Most notably, in data (40) *tuah dadi beban keluarga* ‘I am the burden of the family’ offers a direct linguistic construction of the self as an impediment to the family’s well-being. Another example from data (42), *WY hidup masih sing ngidang megae ngudiyang* ‘I still cannot do anything even if I continue living’ reinforces the notion that continued existence equates to continued uselessness, further solidifying the speaker’s view of themselves as a liability.

Additionally, the dataset shows instances of existential hopelessness, with phrases found in data (40). These utterances extend beyond isolated acts of failure to a total negation of self-worth and purpose, a linguistic pattern that supports the authentic emotional despair typically found in authentic suicide notes (Olsson, 2012).

#### 4.1.9 Prescriptive-Directive Communication

According to Olsson (2012), authentic notes frequently contain instructions, requests, or advice directed toward the recipients, specifying what should or should not be done after the writer’s death. These prescriptive statements not only reflect a concern for others but also a desire to maintain some agency over future events, even in the writer’s absence. In the Balinese suicide notes analyzed, prescriptive-directive communication is notably frequent and linguistically distinctive as seen on Table 8.

One salient feature is the recurrent use of imperative constructions to issue direct commands, advice, or requests. Several examples, such as in data (43) *Runguang pianak nah* ‘Take care of the children’ and *Gus runguang mama nah de kaline nyen mama* ‘Gus, take care of Mom, do not leave her’, use clear imperative forms. In Balinese grammar, the imperative is commonly marked by the suffix *-ang* attached to the verb root. In *runguang* ‘take care of’ which comes from *rungu* and *-ang*, the suffix functions to form a command directed at the second person.

Table 8. Expressions of Prescriptive-Directive Communication

No. Data	Data	Source
43	<i>Runguang pianak nah</i> 'Take care of the children' <i>Yasang Pak Uli dini</i> 'Please pray for me' <i>Gus runguang mama nah de kaline nyen mama</i> 'Gus, take care of Mom, do not leave her' <i>Y runguang mama nah</i> 'Y, take care of Mom okay?'	SN-1
44	<i>Orin tunangan A ne nglokin A pak tepuk ne terakhir kali</i> 'Please tell my girlfriend to see me for the last time' <i>ajak orin timpal-timpal A konyang nglokan mai Pak</i> 'and please tell all my friends to see me' <i>inget chat sep pak</i> 'Remember to chat her, Dad'	SN-2
45	<i>T berjuang nah bareng-barengin ibuk</i> 'T, keep going okay, help Mom' <i>T berjuang nah selegin melajah</i> 'T, keep going and study hard'	SN-3
46	<i>Jadi anak baik yan</i> 'Be good children'	SN-4
47	<i>Men W mati melahang ajak panake</i> 'If I die, take care of the children' <i>Men W mati adepo darane</i> 'If I die, just sell the birds' <i>Men sing ngidang ngarit ape dep sampine.</i> 'If you cannot mow, just sell the cows'	SN-5

Source: Research Data

4.1.10 Expression of Inability to Live

This feature represents the writer’s acknowledgment that life has become unmanageable or unbearable, which leads them to the decision to end it. The linguistic articulation of this inability is typically marked by verbs of negation and limitation, conveying hopelessness and a perceived absence of alternatives.

Table 9. Expressions of Being Unable to Continue Living

No. Data	Data	Source
48	<i>Pak sing ngidang nyalanan hidup biin</i> 'I cannot continue living'	SN-1
49	<i>A amone ngidang nyalanin hidupe</i> 'I can only live up to this point'	SN-2

Source: Research Data

Both examples as seen on Table 9 share a semantic field of finality and existential closure. They not only communicate an inability to persist but also represent life as a process that the speaker can no longer engage with. In Balinese, as in many languages, the use of modality verbs *ngidang* 'can/able' combined with negation *sing* 'not' is a powerful way to express such existential constraints as seen from data (48). Data (49) expresses the ability to only live until a certain

point which represents the inability to live as destined by God. The use of the word *amone* ‘up to this point’ is influenced by the cultural principle of Balinese.

## 4.2 Balinese Worldview on Finality

According to the findings on 4.1, several concepts about finality from Balinese perspective is deduced. Suicidal proposition, reference to death, obscure context, and expression of inability to live lead to the journey worldview. Apology and self-blaming express the believe of suicide as an act of defilement. Prescriptive-directive communication, proposition directed to recipient, and expression of love convey the concept of responsibility and debt.

### 4.2.1 Death is a Journey

The conceptualization of death as a journey is a cornerstone of the Balinese worldview as evidenced by the recurring linguistic patterns in Table 1. This finding directly addresses the second research problem concerning how the Balinese worldview is reflected in expressions of finality. In these notes, the act of suicide is consistently framed through culturally-bound motion verbs, specifically *mejalan* (to walk/leave’ and *luas* ‘to go out’. These are not merely euphemisms as they carry cultural load that map the physical act of departure onto the metaphysical transition of the soul.

Denotatively, these are action verbs used in mundane daily discourse. People normally use them in sentences such as *i meme mejalan ke peken badung* ‘The mother walked towards the Badung market’ or *Made lakar mejalan luas megae* ‘Made is ready to go to work’ (BASAbali Wiki, 2025). However, in the context of finality, these verbs undergo a pragmatic shift. A critical finding in this study is the high degree of volitionality in the sentence constructions. The victims predominantly use the active voice and position themselves as the deliberate agents of their departure. By using the verbs, the victim is not a passive victim of fate but an active one. This linguistic agency reflects the conscious decision to end one’s life.

Yet, this agency is paradoxically intertwined with the Balinese philosophical resignation of *nak mula keto* ‘it is simply so’, which is a culturally embedded stance of acceptance toward circumstances perceived as unavoidable or already fated (Setiawan, 2025). While the choice to leave is active as stated earlier, the timing is often presented as an inevitable limit. As seen in Data 1, the phrase *Mungkin pejalan Pak tuah amone* ‘Perhaps my journey is only up to this point’ invokes an interpretive premise of a destined death. This reflects a deep-seated belief in the *niskala* ‘unseen’ realm that emphasizes the victim chooses to walk out of life but can only walk as far as the unseen forces have pre-destined.

These journey metaphors function as a hegemonic monologue. (Hobart, 2019) argues that monologue is used in Bali to re-assert ideology and prevent contradiction. When a victim writes, “*Mungkin pejalan Pak tuah amone* ‘Perhaps my journey is only up to this point’, the victim is not inviting a dialogue or seeking help. Instead, he/she is authorizing his/her exit by presenting it as a completed and non-negotiable path. By marginalizing alternatives through this monologic tone, the victim asserts that their death is the only option, which is a key psychological marker as a primary indicator of a genuine suicide note (Pastika et al., 2025).

Widnya (2008) describes suicide as an anti-climax to the divine ideal of the Balinese life cycle. Through the language of finality, the victims attempt to linguistically steer this anti-climax back toward a traditional religious trajectory. They frame their act of suicide as a natural journey that has simply reached its destination.

This worldview, packaged in a metaphor, is reinforced through early schooling about concepts of life (Septyani et al., 2023); therefore, Balinese people are familiar with the conceptual metaphor of life as a journey (Nurhidayati & Mulyadi, 2023; Widiatmika, 2023), TriKona, the cycle of *Utpatti* ‘birth’, *Sthiti* ‘life’, and *Pralina* ‘death’ and Samsara, the journey of life (Teng, 2024; Wiratmaja et al., 2021). This alignment serves as a vital forensic marker of authenticity within Balinese cognitive framework where suicide is rationalized as reaching the end of a destined road, rather than a disruption of it.

#### 4.2.2 Act of Defilement

A distinct linguistic feature identified in the analyzed notes is the theme of spiritual pollution as expressed through apologies for making a place dirty as shown by data 36. While Western suicide notes often feature apologies for emotional pain caused to survivors, Balinese notes extend this apology to the physical and spiritual environment. This is exemplified in the use of the term *kotor* ‘dirty/defiled’ as seen in data 36 *Tiang ngae kotor tempat bapak* ‘I made your place dirty’.

This linguistic focus is rooted in the Balinese concepts of *cuntaka* ‘dirty (usually used for beings)’ and *leteh* ‘dirty (usually used for places)’ (Sutajaya et al., 2024; Wijaya, 2019). These concepts are synonymous in explaining a state of spiritual impurity. In the Balinese Hindu worldview, suicide is classified as *ulah pati* ‘suicide’, an intentional inappropriate death that occurs before one’s allotted time (Sasmita & Winiantari, 2024). Unlike a natural death, suicide is believed to leave behind a stain of negative energy that pollutes the *sekala* ‘the seen’ land and disturbs the *niskala* ‘the unseen’. When *ulah pati* happens, it necessitates a *caru* ritual, a sacrificial purification intended to restore the spiritual harmony of the location (Anjani & Amritha, 2025; Hasan et al., 2025).

The forensic significance of this finding lies in the victim's awareness of their spatial debt. By linguistically labelling their act as dirty, the victims acknowledge that their death is not a private exit but a communal burden. They are cognizant that their family and the property owner must bear the significant financial and social cost of purification rituals to remove the negative energy. From a forensic linguistic perspective, the act of defilement is a crucial authenticity marker. As noted by Pastika et al. (2025), genuine suicide notes are characterized by self-blame and internalized experience, whereas fabricated notes often feature external anger or blame. The Balinese victims' focus on their own body as a source of dirtiness is the ultimate form of internalized self-blame.

Furthermore, this theme reinforces the interpretive premise that the self is inextricably linked to the environment. The apology for defilement serves as a cultural marker of authenticity; a forged note written by someone outside the Balinese culture might focus on personal regret but would likely overlook this specific spatial-religious obligation. Therefore, the presence of terms related to dirtiness and cleansing acts as a high-level indicator of a writer who is deeply socialized within the Balinese collective identity, where the individual's final act is measured by its impact on the sacredness of the soil.

#### 4.2.3 Responsibility and Debt

The third thematic pillar identified in the notes is the intersection of prescriptive-directive communication, recipient-directed propositions, apology, and expressions of love. While these features may appear as conventional last wishes, they are deeply rooted in the Balinese theological framework of *tri rna* 'the three inherited debts', a Hindu concept that holds individuals as bearing lifelong obligations to God, to ancestors, and to spiritual teachers (Subanda et al., 2022) and *swadharma* 'self-duty', a concept in Hindu that is understood as the lawful social and spiritual duty of a human ((Dutt, 2018).

The predominant use of the imperative mood shown in Table 2 serves as a formal transfer of *Swadharma*. In Balinese Hinduism, every individual has a sacred obligation to their familial and communal roles (Dutt, 2018). Suicide is an abandonment of this duty. Consequently, the high-agency, prescriptive nature of the notes is a final effort to delegate these responsibilities. The victim linguistically appoints a successor to ensure the family unit does not collapse socially or spiritually.

The finding that the sampled notes are almost exclusively recipient-directed is consistent with the Balinese cultural orientation toward non-individualism. In Balinese society, personhood is fundamentally relational rather than autonomous, and identity is constructed through embeddedness in social institutions such as the *banjar* 'neighborhood association' and *desa adat*

'customary village'. These institutions structure everyday life through collective decision-making, mutual obligation, and ritual cooperation, reinforcing the primacy of communal belonging over individual self-definition (Mahastuti et al., 2025).

This communal ethos is further reinforced by normative ethical frameworks such as *catur guru* 'the four revered authorities', namely parents, teachers, government, and deities and *pawongan*, which emphasizes social harmony and balanced interpersonal relations. Through these concepts, individuals are socialized from an early age to understand themselves as moral actors whose actions carry consequences for a network of others (Arjawa, 2024). Maturity and moral worth are thus measured not by individual achievement alone, but by one's ability to fulfil socially ascribed roles within the family, kin group, and village community.

Within this framework, social roles are inseparable from responsibility. To exist as a family member, a ritual participant, or a community member entails ongoing obligations that must be continuously enacted. Suicide, therefore, is not construed solely as the termination of an individual life but as the abrupt cessation of role performance. This cessation transforms unfulfilled obligations into moral and social debts as the individual is no longer able to uphold the responsibilities embedded in their relational position.

It is within this moral economy of obligation and indebtedness that recipient-directed suicide notes acquire their significance. By explicitly addressing family members or community figures, the writers acknowledge the relational consequences of their death and attempt to symbolically manage the debts incurred by their departure. The articulation of last wishes, apologies, or instructions functions as a compensatory act, seeking to restore social balance by transferring responsibility, requesting forgiveness, or minimizing the burden placed on those who remain. In this sense, the recipient-directed nature of the notes reflects not individual self-expression but a final act of social positioning.

### 4.3 Cultural Influences on Authentic Linguistic Features of Balinese Suicide Notes

#### 4.3.1 Tri Hita Karana and Tri Rna

The philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, comprising *parhyangan* 'harmony with the Divine', *pawongan* 'harmony with fellow humans', and *palemahan* 'harmony with the environment', constitutes the ontological foundation of Balinese life (Hobart, 2019; Widnya, 2008). This study finds that Balinese suicide notes function as a record of triple disharmony. The *parhyangan* disharmony is shown by the victims used suicide as a part of their journey of lives, the *pawongan*

disharmony is shown by relational guilt and apology toward family and friends, and the *palemahan* disharmony is shown by the perspective of making a place spiritually dirty. Rather than being ordinary letters of intent, they are linguistic instruments used by the victim to negotiate their departure from these three pillars of existence.

Within Balinese Hindu belief, life is understood as a debt. When one is born, it is believed that the person lives to pay off the debt of the previous life (Putri et al., 2025). The attempt to pay off the debt is one way to balance the harmony with the Divine. However, when one commits suicide, one performs a disruption in maintaining *parhyangan*. Therefore, Balinese suicide notes can have expressions of destined death, act of defilement, and apology. Furthermore, the suicide notes analyzed in this study reveal a consistent linguistic strategy aimed at reconfiguring this disruption. Journey metaphors, such as *mejalan* ‘to walk/leave’ and *luas* ‘to go’, function as attempts to recast an unnatural act as a predestined conclusion. Through this framing, the victims seek to align their actions with the logic of inevitability rather than transgression.

As the apology is intended to other people, victims try to maintain the social harmony represented by *pawongan*. This relational rupture is reflected linguistically in the high frequency of recipient-directed propositions and prescriptive-directive speech acts found in the notes. These features indicate that the victims orient their final discourse toward others rather than toward self-expression. Not only apologies, but also expressions of love are written by the victims. Within the *pawongan* principle, the victims were driven to settle the debt to other people shown by prescriptive-directive communication. In this principle, there is also an overlap principle, which is *pitra rna* ‘debt to ancestors and parents’. Hence, victims ask family members to do their last wishes, mainly to take care of other members.

The *palemahan* dimension foregrounds harmony between humans and their physical environment. Suicide in Bali is not only a moral or spiritual violation but also a spatial one as it is believed to contaminate the land (Sasmita & Winiantari, 2024). A distinctive linguistic marker identified in the data is the explicit apology for causing defilement, which signals the victim’s internalization of *palemahan* principle. Such apologies indicate an awareness that the act has disrupted not only social and divine harmony but also the sanctity of place.

#### 4.3.2 Indirectness in Speech

A salient pragmatic feature of Balinese suicide notes identified in this study is the pervasive use of linguistic indirectness, commonly referred to in Balinese discourse as *makulit* (Hobart, 2019). Etymologically derived from *kulit* ‘skin’, *makulit* denotes a mode of expression in which meaning is layered, veiled,

or partially concealed. Communication operating under this principle requires the recipient to move beyond the surface form of the utterance and infer the intended meaning through contextual, cultural, and pragmatic cues.

As Kardana et al. (2023) observe, indirectness is a normative communicative strategy in Balinese society, employed primarily to preserve social harmony and to avoid overt confrontation. One manifestation of this strategy is the frequent use of declarative sentence forms to convey implicit commands, requests, or irreversible states of affairs. Within the context of suicide notes, this indirectness allows writers to communicate the finality of their actions without explicit reference to self-inflicted death.

For instance, the utterance *Mungkin pejalan Pak tuah amone* 'Perhaps my journey is only up to this point' exemplifies how a declarative statement functions as a linguistic skin through which the reality of death is conveyed. Rather than explicitly stating an intention to die, the victim relied on metaphor and shared cultural knowledge to signal finality. This strategy enables the maintenance of indirectness even in the context of suicide. Indirectness, in this sense, operates as a face-saving mechanism that mitigates the symbolic violence of naming the act directly. By presupposing the recipients' ability to infer meaning without explicit articulation, the indirectness in suicide notes reflects cultural intelligence and familiarity of Balinese politeness.

A similar pragmatic effect is observed in the recurrent use of motion verbs such as *mejalan* 'to walk/leave' and *luas* 'to go'. Their semantic ambiguity exemplifies *makulit*, which means the act of suicide is not linguistically declared but must be pragmatically inferred, relying on culturally shared interpretive frames.

The tendency toward indirectness is further reinforced by the presence of self-blaming expressions that remain markedly under-elaborated. Victims often acknowledge fault or impurity without specifying causes, agents, or circumstances. This lack of elaboration contributes to textual obscurity and reflects a broader cultural preference for restraint in self-disclosure. Rather than explicating personal suffering or assigning blame, victims present minimal statements that gesture toward responsibility while withholding narrative detail.

This communicative restraint aligns with the principle of *koh ngomong*, a reluctance or inhibition in verbal expression, identified by Setiawan (2025) as a socially conditioned response to sustained social, economic, and political pressures. Within this framework, silence, ambiguity, and indirectness become meaningful communicative choices rather than deficiencies. In the context of suicide notes, *makulit* thus functions not only as an aesthetic preference but also as a culturally sanctioned strategy for expressing irreversible action while preserving social decorum, linguistic elegance, and communal harmony.

### 4.3.3 *Karma Phala*

An additional cultural framework that exerts a significant influence on the linguistic features identified in this study is the Balinese-Hindu doctrine of *karma phala*. Within Balinese belief, it denotes the moral law of cause and effect, whereby every action inevitably produces a corresponding result, whether in the present life or in future existences (Pandeyana & Dharma, 2024). This principle does not merely function as a theological abstraction but operates as a deeply internalized moral logic that governs self-perception, responsibility, and communicative behavior.

The influence of *karma phala* is most clearly reflected in the prevalence of self-attribution and moral self-accounting within the suicide notes. Rather than externalizing blame toward social structures, individuals, or circumstances, the victims consistently frame suffering and failure as the consequence of their own actions. This aligns with the belief that one's present condition is the cumulative result of past deeds, rendering overt complaint or accusation both inappropriate and spiritually counterproductive. Linguistically, this manifests in minimalistic self-blaming expressions that acknowledge fault without elaboration, explanation, or justification.

Furthermore, *karma phala* intersects with the relational obligations discussed under *pawongan*. By issuing apologies, instructions, or requests for ritual completion, the victims attempt to mitigate the karmic consequences of their actions for surviving family members (Valentina & Nurcahyo, 2025). Language becomes a tool for redistributing moral burden, acknowledging fault while seeking to prevent its negative effects from extending onto others. In this sense, recipient-directed directives function not only as social reparations but also as karmic safeguards.

In sum, *karma phala* operates as a cultural regulator that shapes the linguistic form, tone, and content of Balinese suicide notes. It encourages self-blame over accusation and indirectness over explicitness. The resulting discourse is characterized by brevity, obscurity, and moral restraint.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined authentic Balinese suicide notes to identify their linguistic characteristics, explore how Balinese worldviews shape expressions of finality, and explain how cultural norms influence markers of authenticity. Using forensic linguistic analysis in combination with Cultural Discourse Analysis, the findings demonstrate that authenticity in Balinese suicide notes is inseparable from cultural context.

Linguistically, the notes in this study align with Olsson's concept of insider language. However, there is a slight variation due to local influence. The

suicidal proposition is rarely stated explicitly; instead, it is conveyed indirectly through metaphor and pragmatic inference. This indicates that authenticity in the Balinese context is marked by restraint, thematic coherence, and internalized blame rather than overt declaration.

At the cultural level, expressions of finality strongly reflect the Balinese worldview. Death by suicide is conceptualized as a journey, which is drawn on core cosmological concepts such as *tri kona*, *samsara*, and the distinction between *sekala* and *niskala*. This metaphor also means a moral and cosmological disruption.

Cultural norms play a decisive role in shaping linguistic markers of authenticity. Norms of indirectness, communicative restraint, relational identity, and karmic accountability influence how intention, guilt, and responsibility are expressed. Recipient-directed directives, apologies, and minimal elaboration function as culturally appropriate strategies to preserve harmony, redistribute responsibility, and mitigate moral consequences. Overall, the findings show that authentic Balinese suicide notes are culturally disciplined texts, where authenticity resides not in explicitness, but in culturally aligned ways of saying and not saying finality.

From a forensic perspective, this study underscores the need for culturally informed frameworks when assessing the authenticity of suicide notes written in local languages. Reliance on surface explicitness or western-oriented criteria risks misinterpretation in contexts where indirectness and metaphor signal sincerity rather than evasion. Incorporating cultural discourse knowledge into forensic evaluation can improve the accuracy of authenticity judgments and reduce the likelihood of false attribution.

Despite its theoretical contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations. The dataset is relatively small due to the sensitive nature of forensic data and the rarity of publicly accessible Balinese suicide notes, which restricts broad statistical generalization. Future research should seek to expand the corpus. Additionally, comparative studies between Balinese notes and those neighboring Indonesian ethnic groups would provide insights into how localized philosophies uniquely shape the discourse of death.

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## AI Disclosure

During the preparation of this work, the authors employed AI, such as Gemini, to assist with linguistic refinement and grammatical accuracy. The authors reviewed and edited the output as needed and take full responsibility for the final content of the article.

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## Author Profiles

**Putu Wahyu Widiatmika** is a lecturer at Bachelor of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University. His research interest is forensic linguistics and language documentation. He also likes to do research in sociolinguistics and descriptive linguistics. Email: wahyu\_widiatmika@unud.ac.id

**I Wayan Pastika** is a professor at the Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University. His research interest is phonetics and phonology as well as forensic linguistics. He has published several books about forensic linguistics, such as *Linguistik Forensik Studi Kasus Lintas Bahasa* (2021) and *Mikroagresi Verbal Buku Ajar Linguistik Forensik* (2026). Email: wayan\_pastika@unud.ac.id

**Christopher Kinipi** is a medical practitioner and associate researcher at the University of Papua New Guinea. His research interest is oral microbiome diversity and population genetics. He also likes to do research in evolutionary medicine and the integration of mental health in primary care. Email: ckinipi@upng.ac.pg