Verifying the authenticity of suicide notes from the perspective of legal linguistics; Introducing Brown and Clark's theme analysis method
(A case study of ten examples of suicide notes in Mashhad)

Suicide has become one of the leading causes of death globally and is more common than homicide in most countries of the world, to the extent that its incidence is approximately ten to twenty times higher than homicide. In the United States, the suicide rate increased by 25.4% from 1999 to 2016. With this increasing trend, it is expected that by 2018, the suicide rate in all US states, except Nevada, will reach 1.4 million suicide attempts and more than 48,000 deaths from suicide, making it the tenth leading cause of death in the United States. According to Iranian forensic statistics, in 2019, 5,143 people committed suicide, which is an increase of 0.8% compared to the previous year; however, official statistics on suicides with notes in Iran have not been published. According to the field study in this study, between 10% and 20% of cases in all age groups leave a suicide note. Suicide notes, which are often found at crime scenes, play a vital role in criminal investigations; on the one hand, they are a valuable source of information for investigating suspicious deaths and are part of the evidence used to reconstruct the victim's characteristics and conclude about the manner of his death, whether natural death, accident, suicide or murder; on the other hand, they face crime scene experts with numerous problems in assessing and correctly attributing it to the deceased; however, there is currently little empirical research to help with such decisions; As a result, assessing the authenticity of suicide notes is a matter of human judgment, and making incorrect decisions in such situations as reconstructing the victim's characteristics, drawing conclusions about the manner of death, and assessing the authenticity of its attribution to the deceased may prolong the criminal investigation process and disrupt the administration of justice. This issue is not unique to Iran and has become a global problem; for example, one of the controversial criminal cases in recent years in the United States was that of Eddie Gilfoyle. He was convicted of murder based on the court's reference to a suicide note attributed to his wife, Paula. The court, examining the linguistic content of the note as evidence at the crime scene and based on other evidence in the case, issued this verdict, arguing that Eddie had dictated the suicide note to Paula under false pretenses. Now the problem is that empirical approaches, such as forgery, handwriting and signature expertise, etc., have many limitations in examining handwritten notes, and there is no scientific or empirical solution for examining electronic notes; so what should be done to verify the authenticity of these notes and discover the truth? Internationally, many studies have been conducted on suicide notes, but most of these studies have been from the perspectives of psychology, psychiatry and sociology, and the examination of these notes from a linguistic perspective is somewhat limited and related to the last few decades. Empirical research related to the analysis of suicide notes from the perspective of forensic linguistics shows two sets of variables that can be useful in predicting the authenticity of the notes. A set of variables related to the structural features of the language. For example, the average sentence length, the percentage of nouns used, the percentage of movement verbs used, the percentage of cognitive verbs and other variables related to content and thematic aspects are the most important linguistic data of the notes. Content analysis is one of the subfields of content analysis and one of the most widely used methods of qualitative data analysis that can be used to identify patterns in qualitative data. This type of descriptive analysis is widely used in interdisciplinary sciences, in the field of humanities, especially linguistics. The main question of this article is: How can the content analysis method, as one of the most used methods of analyzing suicide notes in forensic linguistics, be used to verify the authenticity of these notes? The author's assumption is that by using this method and identifying the themes in real notes, a criterion can be drawn for distinguishing real notes from fake ones. Given the importance of this issue for the author, this article has attempted to simply introduce the above method and how it is used in examining suicide notes, and in the near future, we will scientifically examine this method in detail, along with statistical analyses consistent with this method.

In the present study, the author first introduced the method of linguistic content analysis of the themes of suicide notes and then conducted a case analysis of ten examples of suicide notes. One of the characteristics of recognizing the theme in the content is its repeatability in the notes. Repetition means the observation

and appearance of two or more items in the text. In note number one, as observed, the theme of feeling love for one's partner and expressing affectionate words to relatives with more than four repetitions, simply in one note, indicates that it can be considered a theme in the notes; as this theme was also repeated repeatedly in seven other notes and in total, in the other ten notes, it was observed seven times, that is, with a frequency of 70 percent. After recognizing the criteria for identifying and classifying themes in the notes, which were examined in cases one to nine, the author in the tenth note examines the method of analyzing themes using the Brown and Clark method, in order to, in addition to introducing this method, also examine its practical functioning in analyzing suicide notes. By applying this method and with the deep understanding that is obtained after examining the content and coding them, main and sub-themes are formed; for example, in examining notes six to ten and identifying the main theme of instructions for survivors, sub-themes of emotional, financial, and prescription instructions were also identified, or in notes one to five, the themes of feeling love for one's partner and expressing affectionate words were merged with each other due to the existence of overlap, and a main theme was formed under the title: "Theme of feeling love for one's partner and expressing affectionate words to relatives." After these steps, the identified themes are reviewed again by the author and the evaluators to avoid any confusion in determining themes and coding. After we have a set of main, sub- and integrated themes, it is time for the final analysis and writing of the report and statistical analyses.