

LINGUISTIC LINKS IN MURDER MANIFESTOS

Makenzie Relford

Dr. Erica Benson | English Department | University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

INTRODUCTION

Mass murders are an uncommon form of homicide. Even more uncommon is having written evidence from the murderers who commit the crimes.

Some of the writings that are left behind are manifestos. The manifesto genre is complex and versatile. It is a hard genre to distinguish due to the lack of study that has been done to give the genre an orderly definition or meaning.

Generally, the author of a manifesto sees him/herself as one who is discovering, inventing, or researching new ideas and concepts that impact the future. Artistic, political, technological, and other types of manifestos exist, but this study focuses on murder manifestos.¹

Manifestos

“Industrial Society and its Future” by Theodore Kaczynski

“My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger” by Elliot Rodger

“The Last Rhodesian” by Dylann Roof



www.indybay.org

Theodore “Ted” Kaczynski demanded that his manifesto “Industrial Society and its Future” be published in the newspaper. In return, he would stop intentionally harming people.



www.latimes.com

People from Isla Vista gather outside of the IV Deli Mart in front of a memorial to honor the victims of the 2014 killing. This is one of the four locations where Elliot Rodger killed.



www.papago.com

Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where Dylann Roof killed nine African Americans with the intent to start a race war.

IMPORTANCE

The focus of this research was not to determine why the criminal committed the crime, but to find connections between the texts of the criminals.

Connections between the manifestos could reveal certain linguistic characteristics which would lead to a better understanding of the inner voice of these dangerous people.

This study is important because it has the potential to identify manifestos that contain language patterns that could lead to threatening or harmful acts. The assessment of these, combined with work from other disciplines such as Criminology, Psychology, and Sociology, might allow us to better recognize, understand, and deter such acts.

Linguistic Features

Linguistic Features	Subjective pronoun	Past tense verb	Comparative adverb	Comparative adjective
Objective pronoun	Present participle verb	Superlative adverb	Superlative adjective	
Possessive pronoun	Past participle verb	Interjection	Swear/taboo words	

A few of these linguistic features are explored in this poster

QUESTIONS

- What linguistic characteristics do these individual killers exploit in the manifestos?
- Are there common linguistics similarities between these authors?
- What information can these texts offer the public and law enforcement about mass murderers?
- What can be learned about the culture that created these criminals?

SIMILARITIES

PRONOUNS

Subject pronouns are the most used pronoun

- The majority of the pronouns discuss who is performing and committing an action
- Each of the authors uses pronouns to create a ‘me’ versus ‘them’ tone
- Kaczynski used third person plural pronouns the most and first person plural second most
 - Saw his position as a member of a group that was against those who supported the rise and growth of technology
- Rodger used first person singular pronouns the most and third person plural second most
 - Viewed himself as the center of the action and felt attacked and singled out by everyone else
- Roof used first person singular pronouns the most and first person plural second most
 - Believed he was the only person that could implement his plan and that there were others who would read his text and feel similar to him

Table 1

Pronouns	Kaczynski	Rodger	Roof
I	7 87.5%	6047 59.9%	55 76.4%
me	1 12.5%	1536 15.2%	8 11.1%
my	-	2491 24.7%	9 12.5%
mine	-	16 .16%	-
we	210 63.1%	461 61.4%	28 58.3%
us	24 7.21%	153 20.4%	7 14.6%
our	98 29.4%	136 18.1%	13 27.1%
ours	1 .30%	1 .13%	-
you	33 82.5%	10 76.9%	5 100%
your	7 17.5%	3 23.1%	-
they	252 48%	512 44.8%	31 67.4%
them	82 15.6%	437 38.2%	9 19.6%
their	191 36.4%	193 16.9%	6 13%
theirs	-	2 .17%	-
?	26 79%	96 52%	13 100%
!	7 21%	90 48%	-

Table 1 shows pronouns, question marks, and exclamation points and their occurrence in each of the manifestos

PUNCTUATION

Questions were asked more often than exclamations

- Table 2 shows that Rodger used questions 52% of the time, Kaczynski 79%, and Roof 100% (not including periods)
- The large majority of questions asked were rhetorical and left unanswered by the author
 - Kaczynski: “But what kind of freedom does one have if one can use it only as someone else prescribes?”²
 - Rodger: “Why does he deserve the love of a beautiful girl and not me?”³
 - Roof: “Who is fighting for these White people forced by economic circumstances to live among negroes?”⁴
- These questions offer a better look into the rationale and mind of the criminal by showing what they couldn’t accomplish or didn’t understand

DIFFERENCES

In addition to being different linguistically, the authors and the details of the murders also differ

- Released to public through different mediums
- Various weapons
- Location of crime differs
- Multiple motives

Table 2

	Kaczynski	Rodger	Roof
Date of crime	1978-1995	23 May 2014	17 June 2015
Date released	22 September 1995	23 May 2014	20 June 2015 (found online under his webname)
Where released	Washington Post newspaper	YouTube, emailed to family/acquaintances	online - website for racist posts/content
Killed	3	6 and self	9
Injured	23	14	1
Weapon	Homemade bombs (16 planted or mailed)	Knives (2), guns (3), vehicle (BMW 328i Coupe)	.45 caliber handgun
Location of crime	Throughout US	Isla Vista, CA (apartment, sorority house, deli, street)	Church in Charleston, SC
Current location of person	U.S. Penitentiary Maximum Facility in Florence, Colorado. Four life sentences plus 30 years	Deceased	Facing the death penalty; may be appealed
Specific targets	Yes	No personal targets – women	No personal targets – African Americans
Reasoning	Opposed industrialization and modern technology	“All of those beautiful girls I’ve desired so much in my life, but can never have because they despise and loathe me, I will destroy!” ²	“...no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.” ³

Table 2 shows the differences in the details of each of the crimes

Future Research

There are linguistic links between these three texts. Before beginning this analysis, it seemed probable that there would be many similarities. However, it was soon apparent that these three texts are highly unique and push the existing manifesto genre in ways that set murder manifestos apart.

Future research possibilities include:

- Research more linguistic features of manifestos
- Explore the connections between suicide notes and manifestos
- Partner with Criminology, Psychology, and Sociology disciplines
- Compare written manifestos to video manifestos
- Collect more manifestos from around the world