

Analysis of Back Cover Books Blurbs in English Lecturer: Ahmed Muhammad University of al-Qadissiya\ College of Education

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present an analysis of blurbs of five books belonging to the same series in linguistics (*Language Series*) published by the same publishing house (*Hodder Education*). The study discusses the two characteristics of blurbs: the communicative purpose and the use of some linguistic and discourse conventions. Blurbs are written to inform about the book as well as to persuade potential buyers/readers to acquire it. A model proposed by Gea-Valor (2005) is applied to these five blurbs. The analysis is split into two parts: the rhetorical structure (in terms of *Gea-Valor's three-move model*) and the linguistic and discourse conventions of: complimenting, ellipsis, the imperative, the address form *you*, *rhetorical questions* and *excerpts from books*. The analysis of the five blurbs has revealed that not only the linguistic and discourse features are subject to variation, as claimed by some studies, but also the generic structure (rhetorical moves) varies depending on the subject of the book. In other words, blurbs are topic-controlled.

الملخص

الغرض من هذه الدراسة تحليل خمس تعريفات لكتب تصدر من نفس المؤسسة (هودر أجوكيشن). تناقش الدراسة خاصيتين من خصائص تعريفات الكتب: الغرض التخاطبي واستعمال بعض الأساليب اللغوية و النصية. الهدف من تعريفات الكتب هو اطلاع و اقناع المشتري أو القراء بشراء الكتاب. طُبِقَ نموذج جي فالور على التعريفات الخمسة المُنتخبة. اظهر التحليل أن التنوع لا يشمل الخصائص اللغوية والنصية كما توصلت اليه الدراسات السابقة ولكن تشمل ايضا البنية النوعية أو ما يُسمى النقلات البلاغية بحسب موضوع الكتاب.

1. Introduction

Books are like any other product in which people invest both money and time. What publishing companies are concerned about is making material profits and popularity. To achieve this goal, the publishers utilize certain devices that appear in different parts of a book. One of these devices is what is called blurb(s). A blurb is a type of text which publishers print on the cover of a book. It, that is blurb, offers the prospective reader an idea of what the book is about. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2004:124) provides the following definition of blurb: "a short description of a book, a new product, etc., written by the people who have produced it, that is intended to attract your attention and *make you want to buy it.*" (italics mine). However, blurbs, as it is clear from the above definition, are not mere descriptions of the contents of a book since they present an *evaluation* and *recommendation* of the book. This is accomplished through the citation of extracts from *reviews* penned by well-known writers in famous newspapers, journals, and magazines. These descriptions, evaluations and recommendations share the communicative purpose of "persuading the potential reader." Book blurbs display a number of linguistic features (lexical, pragmatic and textual) which make blurbs a topic worthy of investigation.

2. The discourse of advertising and the blurb

Advertising is all about informing and promoting. To achieve the desired promotion of any product, advertising has to be persuasive (Bloor and Bloor, 2007:141). Persuasion is a key factor in the process of informing. A great deal of the persuasion of an advertisement relies on the exploitation of intertextuality which involves the explicit imitation of familiar genres (Ibid: 142). Promotion means drawing the target audiences' attention as well as the availability and desirability of the product (Woods, 2006: 1-2). The message sent to the audience must be attractive and memorable. It is worth mentioning that, as a main function of advertising, persuasion is inseparable from the social and cultural environment in which it is produced. In other words, it does not exist in a social and cultural vacuum (Ibid: 9). Some authors such as Cook (2001: 10) claim that persuasion is not the only function for which

advertisements are produced since some advertisements are meant to amuse, inform, misinform, worry, or warn. Advertisements have been categorized differently by different authors. These differences are based on the criteria used:

1. Media: this type includes newspapers, magazines, hoardings, radio, television and Internet.
2. Product or service: this is subclassified into: luxuries vs. household, product advertisements vs. non-product ones.
3. Technique: this is related to the way or means by which the advertisement is carried out such as the hard-sell advertisement (direct) and soft-sell advertisement (indirect).
4. Consumer: this type is considered the most important factor for the success of any advertisement.

Another classification of advertisements is offered by Vestergaard and Schröder (1985:8) which divides them into: commercial and non-commercial advertisements. The former is subdivided into: prestige, industrial, and consumer advertising. These writers agree with Cook concerning the importance of the consumer advertisement being “*the most widespread and persuasive in our society, because it involves the promotion of goods and/or services to potential buyers.*” (Italics mine). The concept of “potential buyers” is grounded on two types of consumer-related needs which force the advertiser to “leave the area of factual information and enter the area of persuasion.”:

1. Material needs (food, drink, clothing)
2. Social needs (membership, recognition, friendship, love)

For a potential buyer, these needs must have “use value”. In the way to do this, “the advertiser is bound to leave the area of factual information and enter the area of *persuasion.*” (italics mine) (Vestergaard and Schröder, 1985:9). Persuasion is attained through recourse to “opinions given by literary critics in renowned newspapers and magazines as authoritative and objective voices that evaluate and recommend the book.” (Gea-Valor, 2005:45).

3. Previous literature

There have been several studies on the nature of blurbs by various researchers from various points of view. The focus of these studies has been on the combination of describing the content and positive evaluation of the work and functions aimed at swaying the actions and judgments of the prospective readers. The following is a brief survey of three major areas of investigation:

3.1 Rhetorical content and organization of blurbs

Kathpalia has conducted a comparative study of international publisher’s book blurbs and those of local Singaporean publishers. In her study, she has pointed out the significance of “sociocultural factors in the shaping of genres.”(Kathpalia,1997:417). Books published both in international and Singaporean contexts draw on six-move schema: headline, justifying the book, appraising the book, establishing credentials, endorsements and targeting the market. Another researcher, Bhatia (2004), has described academic works in terms of a five-move schema. These include: headline, establishing the field, appraising the book, targeting the market and establishing credentials. Gea-Valor (2005) has studied online blurbs of news releases (fiction and non-fiction) of four major publishing companies and identified a three-move schema. This schema comprises Move 1 (description), Move 2 (evaluation), and Move 3 (about the author). A study was done by Neslihan Önder (2013:171-193) who investigated the generic and promotional elements of the online fiction blurbs accompanying the 95 bestselling books from Amazon United Kingdom and Okuoku Turkey. Her study follows a two-level schematic structure (moves and steps). The findings reveal a six-move schematic structure used in Amazon UK book blurbs that includes: complimenting the author, book description, justifying the book,

book promotion, authors background and authors website/blog. In the Okuoku book blurbs, an five-move schematic structure: complimenting the author, book description,

involving the reader, book promotion and authors background. Analysis of promotional elements in the corpora shows the online fiction book blurbs make use of “the art of advertising through the use of favorable expressions and innovative uses of rhetorical strategies to persuade the reader to read the book.”(Önder, 2013:171).

The second area of investigation has been the features of language use, focusing on the linguistic choices blurbers make. Gea-Valor (2005) has identified key pragmatic functions (complimenting) and micro-level features of discourse (imperatives). Cacchiani (2007) has investigated the range and frequencies of intensifiers (extraordinary, highly).

The emphasis of these studies has been on the promotional role of the blurbs and the way language is employed in praising and complimenting the work.

The other line of enquiry has concentrated on the variation in the genre. Cronin and La Barre (2005) have compared the number of testimonials on the back covers of books published in the fields of business and history. They have concluded that business books had “almost twice as many ‘blurbs’ as books on history.”(Basturkmen, 2009: 70). The comparative study by Kathpalia (1997) mentioned above has revealed that blurbers in the Singaporean context utilize the same set of moves. However, the study has found differences in the *sequencing* and *embedding* of the moves, the way they are realized linguistically and the use of evaluation. With regard to evaluations in blurbs, Gestuato (2007) has found “relatively little variation” between the fields of biology, engineering, education and linguistics. Bhatia (2004) has examined blurbs on a work of fiction and one on an academic work. The results of this study have revealed that these blurbs have similarities in the communicative purpose, grammatical choices and variation in lexical choices.

3.2 Blurbs and cultural values

Basturkmen (1999) has analysed blurbs for EFL course books. The study concentrates on the “values of the EFL teaching community in a particular context.”

She assumes that language teaching is “value-laden “and that choices made by teachers and course developers reflect these values. Any new theory and perspective about the best way to learn and teach languages find their way into course books, though not “immediately and fully embodied into course book design, and course book developers vary in the extent to which these ideas are incorporated”. (Ibid., 71-2). It is assumed that ELT course books blurbs are “cultural artefacts” on the grounds that they reflect “mainstream views of the ELT community at a particular point in time.” The layout of blurbs is intended to draw the teachers attention to the book to be chosen and used by them in teaching. Therefore, publishers and blurbers try to make sure that the blurbs are in line with whatever needs, values and expectations teachers adhere to.

3.3 Linguistic and discourse conventions of blurbs

An interesting aspect of back cover book blurbs is the kind of linguistic features employed to gain the attention of the potential reader. Bhatia (2004: 171) states that “from lexical choice one can safely predict that the text belongs to an academic research genre... .” The persuasive function for which blurbs are written is thus intended to gain the potential reader’s attention.

Further, they try to persuade the customer to buy the book by means of “emphasizing and praising its qualities”. This persuasive language, as Marciulionien (2003: 65-9) puts it, is characterized by” value-laden vocabulary and a variety of expressions that point to the wide scope and universality of the book, its uniqueness/rarity, popularity and novelty.” In the following, some of the linguistic and discorsal devices employed in blurbs are presented:

3.3.1 Intensifying adverbs

According to Biber et al. (2000: 554-5), intensifying adverbs belong to the subcategory of degree adverbs. They are used before gradable adjectives indicating “degrees on a scale” or “an endpoint on a scale” as in the sentences below:

1. Most will be **extremely** cautious until new case law defines the extent of the new Act.
2. But snow and ice accumulate in a **totally** different way from sediment.

Cacchiani (2007: 9-11) discusses the use of intensification in book blurbs from semantic and pragmatic perspectives. Intensifiers indicate “the semantic role of degree”. Three types of intensifiers are recognized:

1. Absolutes/completives (absolutely great)
2. Intensifiers of the extremely high degree (extremely high)
3. Intensifiers of the high degree (very)

Intensifiers show differences in terms of “type and degree of expressivity and speaker’s involvement and commitment.” Hence, three categories are identified:

1. Subjective or personal
2. Undistinguished emotions
3. Specific emotions

Intensifiers, according to Quirk et al. (1999: 589), do not only indicate “an increase in intensification” but also “a point on an abstractly conceived intensity scale.” The point may be high or low and the scale is applicable to a predicate, predication, verb phrase or an item within it. The verbs which are involved here express “attitude”.

3.3.2 Ellipsis

Ellipsis involves omitting elements that are recoverable from the linguistic or situational context. Elliptical syntactic patterns are used to influence and gain the reader’s attention (Gea-Valor, 2005:55-6).

Ellipsis is also utilized to “imitate real speech and to establish proximity with the audience.” Another aim behind the use of ellipsis, as stated by Carter et al. (1997: 211), is to “create an illusion of closeness” between the reader and writer. In the following example blurb is an illustration of this:

1. “**A triumph**”-Ali Smith (An Evening of Long Goodbyes, by Paul Murray, Penguin).

A common form of ellipsis in blurbs is subject ellipsis to imitate the “spoken language” (Gea-Valor, 2005: 56):

2. “Inspiring... **offers** a real sense of what it’s like to be at the beginning of something Big” (Sync, by Steven H. Strogatz. Penguin).

3.3.2 Imperative

The imperative is not only used to make commands. According to Eastwood (2002: 22) there are other uses such as issuing slogans and advertisements: e.g. “Save the rainforests.”, “Visit historic Bath.” The imperative is to be understood as a kind of invitation or recommendation not as normally interpreted in the sense of a command or an imposition.

This function of imperative is basically *persuasive* targeting the potential buyer:

3. “**Steal yourself** for a gripping tale of obsession, madness and fear”-Sunday Mirror(Land of the Living, by Nicci French. Penguin).

3.3.4 Superlatives

The use of the superlative form is another characteristic of blurbs. Gea-Valor and Ros (2009: 212) maintain that these are used to “qualify the book in absolute terms”:

4. Beowulf is **the most important** Old English poem and perhaps **the most significant** single survival from the Anglo-Saxon period.

Blurbs employ prepositional phrases with “positive adjectives” and the syntactic structure: one of the most+ string of adjectives:

5. Tess of the d’Urbervilles is **one of the most moving and poetic** of Hardy’s novels.

3.3.5 Curiosity arousers

To fire the reader’s interest and attention in the subject which the book tackles. Gea-Valor (2005: 59) remarks that these include the use of “excerpts from the books” containing “especially powerful meaningful sentences” as in the example she provides:

6. “When the first bullet hit my chest, I thought of my daughter...” (No Sound Chance, by Harlan Coben. Barnes & Noble).

Another form of arousers is the use of *rhetorical questions* containing key elements of the plot or argument and leaving the reader on a cliff-hanger.(Ibid: 60). They are utilized to

indirectly “make a comment or an exclamation.”(Downing and Locke, 2006:201).The following example reflects this:

7. “Are the differences between the sexes really just down to our upbringing or is there another, more fundamental explanation?”(The Essential Difference, by Simon Baron, Penguin).

4.Methodology and Data

In the present study, the three-move model by Gea -Valor has been adopted. The reason for choosing this model is its basicness. All blurbs are basically expected to contain these three moves. In addition to analysing the three moves used in the corpus, a linguistic analysis will be necessary to fully understand the structure of the blurbs under discussion. The linguistic features employed by the writer(s) of the blurb (the blurbers) have a great impact on the rhetorical structure (moves) of each blurb. So the practical part will cover two aspects of this specific genre: the *generic structure* and the *linguistic and discourse features* as discussed earlier in 3.3.

The corpus of this study, *five back cover blurbs* belonging to the language series entitled *Understanding Language Series* published by *Hodder Education* and edited by *Bernard Comrie* and *Greville Corbett*. The five blurbs appear on the back covers of the following:

1. Understanding Phonetics (2012)
2. Understanding Morphology (2010)
3. Understanding Syntax (2009)
4. Understanding Semantics (2002)
5. Understanding Pragmatics (1999)

The order of these books will be retained in the analysis as inspired by the order in which these branches of linguistics have been dealt with. Next, an attempt is made to compare the five blurbs for any similarities and differences.

Text 1: Understanding Phonetics

‘... an excellent introduction into the field of phonetics...presents an impressive account of *the articulatory, acoustic and perceptual aspects of human speech sounds*.’ Marc Swerts, Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Assuming little or no background knowledge and using original examples and exercises (with answers supplied), *Understanding Phonetics* provides you with an accessible introduction to the basics of phonetics and a comprehensive analysis of traditional phonetic theory-the articulation and physical characteristics of speech sounds.

Examples from a wide range of languages are presented throughout using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. To help you develop your practical skills in this alphabet, *Understanding Phonetics* includes ear-training exercises that are available free online, along with audio files of authentic listening material, for you to download.

Understanding Phonetics outlines the production of consonants, vowels, phonation types, pitch and intonation, and aspects of connected speech. Reading through chapter by chapter, you will see your knowledge develop as you engage in the step-by-step phonetic study of a selected word.

Understanding Phonetics is designed to be used not only as a class textbook but also for self-study. It can be read systematically or used for reference purposes.

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Series editors: *Bernard Comrie*, Max Planck Institute for Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany, and *Greville Corbett*, University of Surrey, UK.

The Understanding Language series provides approachable, yet authoritative, introductions to major topics in linguistics. Ideal for students with little or no prior knowledge of linguistics, each book carefully explains the basics, emphasizing understanding of the essential notions rather than arguing for a particular theoretical positions.

FREE WEB RESOURCES

Resources supporting this book are available online at www.hodderplus.com/linguistics

These resources include:

- Answers to exercises within the book
- Audio files of authentic listening material

Analysis

This blurb begins with *Move 2* evaluation by means of review excerpts. This is obvious from the quotation marks enclosing the excerpt extracted from a longer review as indicated by the three dots (...). The name of the critic (*Marc Swerts*) is mentioned at the end of the quoted material. He is affiliated to an academic institution (*Tilburg University*) followed by the place of publication (*The Netherlands*).

The following *four* paragraphs constitute *Move 1*, i.e., the description of the book. Each paragraph presents a summary of the contents of the book. *Move 3* (or about the author) as expected, comes last. The author's name: *Patricia Ashby* and her professional background: *Emeritus Fellow* without mentioning any previous publications, awards, current interests or place of residence and family details. However, the academic institutions to which the author is currently affiliated is offered: *University of Westminster* and *Higher Education Academy*. The series editors' names are mentioned below the author's. Here, the academic establishments to which they belong as well as place of residence: *Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology* and *University of Surrey* on the other hand, and *Leipzig, Germany* and *UK* on the other. The question now is why does this blurb begin with *Move 2* rather than *Move 1*.

The typical function of *Move 2* is affective. The aim of it is to convince the reader, the potential buyer, of the qualities and beneficial effects of the book. To begin with evaluation, in the researcher's opinion, is to create a balance between the inherent stiffness of a topic such as phonetics due to its dominating prelinguistic and experimental nature. Another feature of this blurb is one that can be considered as a further evaluation targeting the series as a whole. This evaluation is supplied by the publishers. It represents another boost to encourage the potential buyer (reader) to acquire the series. The evaluation is placed right below the information about the series editors. The series publishers use more incentives to appeal to the needs of the buyers. They offer a web site for that contains answers to questions inside the book and audio files to persuade readers who wish to sharpen and optimize their listening capabilities.

As far as the linguistic and discourse conventions employed in this blurb, the review excerpt begins with the positive evaluating adjectives excellent, impressive. Obviously these two adjectives are aimed to *praise* both the book and the author. Other adjectives used similarly are: original, accessible, comprehensive, wide, practical, free, audio, authentic, approachable, and authoritative. All of these adjectives as used attributively, i.e., they precede a noun that refers to a part of the book or related to it: introduction, account, analysis, examples, skills, listening material, and files.

No complimenting to the authors of the book or the series editors is given in the blurb but it is only indirectly inferred from the highlighted features of the book. Hence, the blurb does not contain any superlative constructions typically used to convey this function (praising). However, the review extract at the very beginning of the blurb praises only the book.

Ellipsis can be observed in the review excerpt. It is marked by the three dots: "...an excellent introduction into the fields of phonetics ...presents an impressive account". There are no other instances of ellipsis besides this one.

No instances of the use of the imperative are found in this blurb.

The writers of this blurb have made an extensive use of the address form *you*. In the second paragraph right after the review excerpt, the pronoun *you* in: Understanding Phonetics

provides *you* with an accessible introduction to the basics of phonetics... . The purpose of employing it here is to involve the potential reader and arouse his interest in the book. Three occurrences of “you” are found in the third paragraph: *To help you develop your practical skills in this alphabet, Understanding Phonetics includes ear-training exercises that are available free online, files of along with audio authentic material, for*

you to download. The last occurrence is in the fourth paragraph:

Reading through chapter by chapter, you will see your knowledge develop as you engage in the step-by-step phonetic study of a selected word. What is interesting is the use of the possessive form *your*. It is used twice before words related to the reader: *practical skills* and *knowledge*. Here, the potential reader is encouraged to acquire the book by appealing to his/her needs. No curiosity arousers (excerpts from books and rhetorical questions) are found in this blurb.

Text 2: Understanding Morphology

Understanding Morphology offers students an introduction to the study of word structure that starts at the very beginning. Assuming no knowledge of the field of morphology, the book presents a broad range of morphological phenomena from a variety of languages.

The goal is to shed light on major issues of analysis, so chapters are structured around essential questions:

- What are the basic units of the lexicon-words or morphemes?
- Is there a categorical differences between inflection and derivation?
- Do the same basic principles apply to both word formation and sentence formation?
- What makes one morphological rule more productive than another?
- How are the inflected forms of a lexeme related to each other?
- Are inflectional paradigms part of the morphological architecture?

To answer these questions, the authors draw on the best research available, discussing a variety of theoretical approaches. This second edition also expands the discussion of several topics, including frequency effects, the structure of the lexicon and productivity.

Each chapter includes a summary, suggestions for further reading and comprehension exercises (with answers). New to this second edition are exploratory exercises which allow students to put what they have read into practice and extend their knowledge.

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Series editors: Bernard Comrie, Max Planck, Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany and Greville Corbett, University of Surrey, UK

This series provides approachable, yet authoritative, introductions to major topics in linguistics. Ideal for students with little or no prior knowledge of linguistics, each book carefully explains the basics, emphasizing understanding of the essential notions rather than arguing for a particular theoretical position.

Analysis

This blurb begins with the typical *Move 1* as it the only obligatory move in book blurbs. The description presents a summary of the contents of the book. The reader is informed about the goal for which the book is written in the form of questions. Features of the second edition of this book are highlighted in the paragraph beginning with: *To answer these questions...*

The writer of the blurb goes on to highlight the other new features of this edition in the following paragraph: *summary, suggestions for further reading and comprehension exercises (with answers)* and the *explanatory exercises*. *Move 2* or evaluation by means of review excerpts is missing (since it is an optional one). The writer of this blurb may have thought that

the topics covered by the book are interesting enough to attract readers' attention, so there is no need for move 2 or simply because no review has ever been written about this book. *Move 3* (about the author) gives the authors' professional background: *Senior Researcher* and an *Honorary Professor* and *Assistant Professor of Slavic Linguistics*. The academic institutions at which the authors work are mentioned: *The Linguistics Department of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology* and the *University of Leipzig, Germany* and the *Ohio State University, USA*. The last paragraph is evaluative in nature. It praises the series as a whole highlighting its features to attract the attention of the buyers and readers.

As far as the linguistic and discourse features, the blurb writer uses the superlative form "the best research available" to compliment the authors and the book. There are no occurrences of the use of ellipsis and imperative. No use of the address form *you* is found here. The writer summarizes the issues dealt with in each chapter by means of six questions to arouse the curiosity of the readers.

Text 3: Understanding Syntax

Series editors: Bernard Comrie, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, and Greville Corbett, University of Surrey.

This series provides approachable, yet authoritative, introductions to major topics in linguistics. Ideal for students with little or no prior knowledge of linguistics, each book carefully explains in the basics, emphasizing understanding of the essential notions rather than arguing for a particular theoretical position.

Understanding Syntax provides a complete introduction to the syntax of human languages. Assuming no prior knowledge of linguistics whatever, the book presents all the major terms and concepts essential to the study of sentence structure. Starting with the basics, it explains why we need to look at languages other than English, and guidance is given as to how to make use of examples from other languages.

Chapter by chapter, the central concepts are introduced, looking first at word classes such as 'noun' and 'verb' and grammatical categories such as 'finiteness' and 'case', then moving on to simple sentences and subordination, head words and their dependents, and constitute structure. Three later chapters examine grammatical constructions and relationships within sentences, looking at constitute order, grammatical relations such as 'subject' and 'object, and explaining syntactic processes such as the passive construction. The final main chapter examines wh-questions, relative clauses and similar constructions. The reader is left with a comprehensive picture of what syntax is and how it is studied in linguistics. A reader-friendly and accessible style, along with many examples and interactive exercises make this textbook the perfect choice for students approaching the subject for the first time.

-Uses examples from over 100 languages

-Introduces all the essentials of syntax

-Teaches important skills, such as how to read linguistic examples and the basics of syntactic argumentation

-Includes short, interactive work sections within chapters, and more in-depth exercises at the end of each chapter

-Includes glossary

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Analysis

Unlike the previous two blurbs, this blurb starts with the series editors' names. The next paragraph presents an appraisal of the series. This same evaluative paragraph is used in the last two blurbs analyzed but it is placed finally. The description of the contents of the book is presented in some detail in the paragraph beginning: *Understanding Syntax provides a complete introduction to the syntax of human languages*. Features of the book and the issues it tackles are further in the form of five points below the afore-mentioned lengthy paragraph. *Move 3* (about the author) comes last. Her professional background is given "Professor of

Linguistics” and place of work the “School of English Literature, Language, and Linguistics, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

The linguistic features in this blurb include the use of the strong positive adjectives such as: *essential*, *comprehensive*, *reader-friendly*, *accessible*, *interactive*, and *perfect*. These adjectives are used attributively, except for the first one, before the nouns: picture, style, exercises, and choice respectively. These patterns are utilized to compliment the book and arouse the reader’s interest and attention. The address form ‘you’ doesn’t occur in this blurb. Ellipsis is found in the five features mentioned below. The sentences in each point are subjectless. They begin with a verb: Uses, introduces, teaches, and includes. They all have the same subject: *Understanding Syntax*. The ellipsis here helps give more liveliness and vivaciousness to the style of the blurb. There is no instance of the use of the imperative in this blurb.

Text 4: Understanding Semantics

Series editors: *Bernard Comrie*, *Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology*, *Leipzig*, and *Greville Corbett*, *University of Surrey*.

This series provides approachable, yet authoritative introductions to all the major topics in linguistics. Ideal for students with little or no prior knowledge of linguistics, each book carefully explains the basics, emphasizing understanding of the essential notions rather than arguing for a particular theoretical position.

Understanding Semantics offers a complete introduction to linguistic semantics. The book takes a step-by-step approach, starting while the basic concepts and moving through the central questions to examine the methods and results of the science of linguistic meaning.

Understanding Semantics unites the treatment of a broad scale of phenomena using data from different languages with a thorough investigation of major theoretical perspectives. It leads the reader from their intuitive knowledge of meaning to a deeper understanding of the use of scientific reasoning in the study of language as a communicative tool, of the nature of linguistic meaning, and of the scope and limitations of linguistic semantics.

Ideal as a first textbook in semantics for undergraduate students of linguistics, this book is also recommended for students of literature, philosophy, psychology and cognitive sciences.

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‘*Understanding Semantics* is an original and innovative resource for introductory courses on linguistic semantics, excelling in particular in consciousness and accessibility of presentation.’ *Linguistics*

Analysis

This blurb begins with the series editors’ names and their academic place of work. This is followed by a paragraph complimenting the series as a whole. It contains positive adjectives such as *approachable*, *authoritative*, and *ideal*. Each book in the series is praised with the adverb *carefully* plus the verb *explains*. Next is a paragraph beginning with the title *Understanding Semantics* as the subject where the book is described here. However, the position of *Move 1* (description) is not the first move on the back cover.

Another paragraph with the same subject further describes the scope of the book. *Move 2* occurs in the paragraph beginning: “Ideal as a first textbook in semantics...”. *Move 3* offers the information about the author of the book includes his professional background: *Professor of General Linguistics*. This is followed by the academic establishment he is associated with: *University of Düsseldorf* and the country: *Germany*. A review excerpt makes the last part of this blurb. It is quoted from a specialized publication entitled “Linguistics”. It is intended as an evaluation move. It is supposed to come after *Move 1*. This mobility is due to the fact that *Move 2* is optional. Complimenting the book is predominant in this blurb. Features such as the use of superlative constructions, ellipsis, imperative or the address form ‘you’ are absent.

Text 5: Understanding Pragmatics

Series Editors: Bernard Comrie, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany and Greville Corbett, University of Surrey

This series provides approachable, yet authoritative, introductions to all the major topics in linguistics. Ideal for students with little or no prior knowledge of linguistics, each book carefully explains the basics, emphasizing understanding of the essential notions rather than arguing for a particular theoretical positions.

What do people do when using language? How exactly is meaning generated when we communicate? And why is so much of what we mean left implicit?

Examining the mental and social processes involved in communicating through language, *Understanding Pragmatics* is a comprehensive introduction to the subject. The book provides an original and systematic outline of the theoretical basis of pragmatics, incorporating its major theoretical perspectives and exploring its methodological issues. Looking at pragmatics in its broadest sense, it covers the whole range of social, cultural and cognitive aspects involved in constructing meaning through language use. Assuming no background in pragmatics, the text provides helpful chapter-by-chapter summaries, suggestions for further reading and research topics for further study.

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Analysis

As in the previous blurb, this one commences with the names of the series editors along with the academic establishments where they currently work. This constitutes Move 3 (about the author). Next is the paragraph beginning with: *This series provides...*, which appears in the previous blurbs combining evaluation with description. The three questions after that are descriptive in nature. They are aimed at arousing the reader's/buyer's interest in the book.

Further description is provided in the paragraph starting: *Examining the mental and social processes...*. The point here is to highlight the good qualities and scope of the book. Again this paragraph mixes description with evaluation. The last part of this blurb makes Move 3. The author's professional background is given: a *Senior Research Associate*. The academic institutes he works for shows his areas of interests. The linguistic devices in this blurb include the use of strong positive adjectives: *approachable, authoritative, ideal, comprehensive, original, systematic* and *helpful*. These are intended to compliment or praise the book (and implicitly the author). The three questions present the three main issues pragmatics has been exploring. The question formula in which these topics are couched helps excite the buyer's/reader's interest in a still growing area of language study. No instance of *the one of + superlative construction* is found. The writer of this blurb uses neither ellipsis nor imperative and certainly no use of the address form *you*. Although the three questions are not exactly rhetorical, yet they can be considered as curiosity arousers. The recency of pragmatics must have imposed the non-use of devices such as ellipsis, imperative or the address form "you" because these devices, as mentioned earlier, have the effect of an *air of familiarity, involvement* and *proximity* between the potential buyer/reader and the book, which is not very helpful.

5. Concluding remarks

Blurbs represent a genre that aims to persuade the reader to buy the book. This is accomplished through providing *a description of the contents of the book* and *complimenting its qualities*. The three moves: description, evaluation and author's biography as proposed by Gea-Valor (2005) show a considerable variation in terms of occurrence. In text 1, the blurb begins with evaluation by quoting an extract of another author's review while text 4 uses a quotation from a specialized journal (Linguistics) but it appears at the end of the blurb. Text 3 doesn't begin with a description but rather with the series editors' background. Text 4 and text 5 follow the same procedure as text 3. Text 2 starts with a description of the contents of

the book. Text 1 differs from the others in providing “free web resources”. This is because phonetics deals with practical issues so the writer of the blurb decides to supply a website that offers readers with a chance to practice and develop their speaking and listening skills. The linguistic and discourse devices discussed by Gea-Valor (2005): *intensifying adverbs, ellipsis, imperative, superlatives* and *curiosity arousers* have been used more in the first blurb of *Understanding Phonetics* than in the other blurbs.

This is due, as mentioned earlier, to the practical and technical nature of phonetics, the thing which has driven linguists to exclude phonetics from linguistics proper. The writers of this blurb probably had to enrich the blurb with more linguistic devices to attract the readers’ attention and convince them to acquire the book. Not all of the linguistic devices typically utilized in blurbs appear in the other four blurbs. This can be justified by saying that morphology, syntax, semantics and, recently, pragmatics are familiar to readers than phonetics. In the light of the analyses, the blurbs also show variation in the use of the linguistic and discourse devices. This variation depends on the topic of the book(s) which are promoted. Blurb writer(s) may have to wield more of these devices, as the situation calls, than in others.

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