Milica S. Bacić[1]
University of Kragujevac
Faculty of Philology and Arts
English Department

THE SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF PROMOTIONAL LANGUAGE IN BOOK BLURBS

The paper presents a comparative analysis of the syntactic level of promotional language in fiction and academic book blurbs. The overall research objective was to identify salient syntactic features and investigate the similarities and differences in the realization of this text-internal aspect of thriller, romance, and linguistics blurbs in English. The analysis shows that their formulaic language exhibits genre-specific patterns and form-function correlations in its syntactic complexity. In order to provide a positive description of a book, blurb writers regularly employ structural parallelism, ellipsis, complex phrases with multiple modification, phrasal and clausal embedding, coordination, and other means of structural reduction. However, individual instantiations also display systematic variability in text-length values and frequency of salient features, with fiction blurbs mainly replicating the conciseness of spoken language and academic blurbs closely resembling formal written language. We conclude that the generic integrity of these texts involves a degree of controlled flexibility at the syntactic level depending on the book type/genre as the defining variable. Additionally, the research confirms that the study of linguistic profiles of genres is fundamentally important for the study of language use, both from a theoretical and applied perspective. The increasing 'generification' of contemporary language, and particularly English as the global *lingua franca*, requires the adoption of a multidimensional genre-based framework in investigating the complex linguistic realities of the 21st century.

Keywords: genre analysis, book blurb, promotional language, syntactic feature, contemporary English

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

With promotion becoming a cultural dominant and a communicative phenomenon in its own right (Wernick 1991: 183, 191), the pervasiveness of promotional language is evident in discourses of different kinds. This has led to the formation of a closely connected colony of promotional genres, one of whose primary members is *the book blurb* (Bhatia 2014: 68–69). Frequently contrasted with the book review because of its strong promotional orientation, the blurb is a metatextual paratext, usually located on the back cover of a book, which serves as a communicative act between the publisher and the target audience (Cronin, La Barre 2005: 17; Gesuato 2007a: 401; Hyland,

1   milica.bacic@filum.kg.ac.rs

Diani 2009: 4). The rationale behind the blurb genre is its twofold – referential and conative – communicative purpose, i.e., persuading potential readers to buy a book by providing information and positive evaluation. It is realized through a set of identifiable, contextually motivated linguistic and rhetorical resources which create the profile of the genre and determine the prototypicality of individual texts as genre instantiations. Although they are sometimes seen as short advertisements that do not directly translate to book sales, blurbs have a unique structure and content mainly because of their form-function correlations (Marčiulionienė 2006: 61–62). Their language is explicitly market-conscious, value-added, and adapted to a well-defined purpose in publishing, which contributes to the complexity of the 'blurbology' phenomenon.

Since all language use is essentially genre-regulated, it is important to investigate the different linguistic tools employed in textual exemplars of genres in order to gain insight into the socio-cognitive realities behind such communicative acts. This observation has been part of the impetus for the present study. Therefore, it should be noted that the study does not purport to contribute to syntactic theory per se, but rather to address specific substantive and methodological issues in genre theory and applied linguistics.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section provides an overview of relevant research on the blurb genre and its promotional language. We then present the overall objectives, corpus, and methodology of the study. The subsequent discussion introduces a comparative analysis of systematic patterns and variations in the usage of salient syntactic features in fiction and academic book blurbs. The final section summarizes the main findings, raises further methodological issues in the investigation of syntactic complexity of genres, and concludes with suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Similar to other written genres, book blurbs are relatively stable, conventionalized textual artefacts that exhibit some variability in their form and content. They are recognizable as such because they maintain what Bhatia (2014: 142–144) has called the 'generic integrity' of the genre, which refers to text-internal and text-external aspects of individual instantiations.[2] The multifaceted nature of blurbs has been researched fairly extensively in genre-based studies. A number of analysts have examined intra- and cross-linguistic variations in their rhetorical structure, both synchronically and diachronically (Kathpalia 1997; Gea Valor 2005, 2007; Gesuato 2007a; Marčiulionienė 2006; Basturkmen

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2   The former include lexico-grammatical, rhetorical, and discoursal features of texts, coupled with their contextual and intertextual aspects, while the latter encompass wider discursive practices and procedures of genre construction, as well as the disciplinary culture of professional communities that employ a genre. The notion of generic integrity is arguably the key element in our understanding of genre theory, and a thoroughly grounded analysis of the two broad categories is necessary for a comprehensive account of any genre. Since the present study is limited to explicating syntactic conventions of blurbs as only one of several text-internal aspects of their generic integrity, we refer the reader to Bhatia (2014) for a detailed discussion of this particular issue.

2009; Gea-Valor, Inigo Ros 2009; Önder 2013; Bacić 2019). They've confirmed that blurbs consist of discourse units known as 'moves' and their subunits 'steps' which contribute to the overall communicative purpose of the genre. Unlike some complex genres, blurbs have a rather simple move structure, with 'describing the book', 'evaluating the book', 'providing information about the author' and 'targeting the audience' being most often identified as obligatory. The perceived flexibility is due to the fact that individual moves can be variable in length and frequency, embedded within other moves or realized through different steps, and will occasionally recur in a cyclical fashion (Bhatia 2014: 202). This is because their rhetorical structure is highly dependent on multiple factors: (1) the type/genre and subject matter of the book itself (e.g., a literary work or specialized literature); (2) the target audience; (3) the time of publication; (4) the mode (a hard copy or a publisher's website); (5) the practices of publishing houses and their individual imprints; and (6) the language and sociocultural context of a discourse community. As a result, blurbs are simultaneously standardized and dynamic constructs, i.e., products of linguistic adaptation to a context in which the same communicative message is aimed at audiences of different backgrounds and presuppositions, so individual instantiations will correspond to genre exemplars to a greater or lesser extent (Bacić 2020: 321).

Adding to this flexibility is their pervasive use of evaluative language. Blurbs are sometimes labelled as an interested evaluative genre because they adopt a promotional stance, as opposed to book reviews as a disinterested genre intended to give the reader an objective evaluation (Shaw 2009: 217). Some studies have therefore focused on the lexico-grammatical means of appraisal in these texts, identifying regular patterns of keywords, collocations, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, ellipsis, metaphorical expressions, word play, and so forth (Gea Valor 2005; Marčiulionienė 2006; Cacchiani 2007; Gesuato 2007b; Bacić 2019, 2020). These linguistic resources are specifically used to emphasize or exaggerate the qualities of a book, such as its novelty, the author's style or the reader's impressions (Bacić 2020: 327–329). However, although they fulfil the same function, blurb writers employ them to varying degrees because they too are contextually motivated.

Due to the strict spatial constraints within which writers must operate, it is to be expected that blurbs exhibit a certain economy of expression, particularly at the syntactic level. Their pragmatism, i.e., the need to effectively get the message across to potential readers, determines the genre-specific values of all of their text-internal features, including the syntactic ones. Furthermore, blurbs are reminiscent of advertising discourse, even though they may not be considered typical instances of it (Gea Valor 2005: 42). The elliptical nature of advertising and its use of block language, replicating spoken communication in order to establish proximity with the customer, are well-observed in literature (see Leech 1966; Cook 2001). These features are arguably characteristic of blurbs as well. However, given their strong contextual dependency, the economy employed in combining description with positive evaluation of books as products requires specific structural formations. The resultant syntactic

complexity and variability in individual textual instantiations are worth investigating to arrive at a more comprehensive account of the blurb genre.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, CORPUS, AND METHODOLOGY

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the syntactic level of promotional language in fiction and academic book blurbs. The overall research objective was to identify salient syntactic features based on their recurrence, with an emphasis on genre-specific patterns of usage and form-function correlations. More specifically, we wanted to investigate the similarities and differences in the realization of this text-internal aspect of thriller, romance, and linguistics blurbs. The corpus comprises 60 texts (a total of 11,342 words) on the back covers of books by four major publishing houses – *Penguin Random House* and *HarperCollins Publishers* for novels, *Oxford University Press* and *Cambridge University Press* for academic writing. All of the books were written in English by different authors and published between 2010 and 2020. To get a representative sample, we made sure to include books belonging to different subgenres of thrillers and romance novels (e.g., spy or crime thrillers, historical or contemporary romances), as well as different subdisciplines and research areas of linguistics (compositional semantics, language endangerment, phonology, etc.).[3] Likewise, we chose to compare blurbs for two literary genres that follow starkly divergent writing conventions, and then cross-reference those findings with the analysis of blurbs for non-fictional, specialized literature in order to observe the full range of variability in these texts. We wanted to determine whether the defining variable in shaping their syntactic form was the book type/genre or the practices of publishing houses. Such purposive sampling was therefore relevant to our research objectives.

The study adopts a descriptive-interpretative multifactorial approach to the blurb genre (Dorgeloh, Wanner 2010: 15, 112). The sampled texts were first read and manually analysed several times to identify prominent syntactic features. The data were then interpreted in order to account for the recorded usage variations and describe the structural complexity of blurbs in relation to the functions that individual features or feature clusters perform. Finally, the emergent regularities of promotional syntax were correlated with the overall communicative purpose of the genre.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The salience of syntactic features ought to be observed first in reference to the distribution of text-length values in the entire corpus (see Table 1). Although we sampled the same number of blurbs for each book type/genre and publisher, the data confirm that they can be variable in length even in relatively homogenized subcorpora due to their dynamic character. There are

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3   A common practice in the publishing business is to have separate imprints/divisions or series for different (sub)genres and subject matters, so we also took that into account in our sample collection.

marked differences between the longest and shortest texts across the three categories, and particularly for linguistics literature. If we compare individual subcorpora, we can notice that both the total and mean values are similar for thriller and romance blurbs, with the latter only being slightly longer. This is expected given the well-established blurb writing practices of major publishers, but may also indicate that blurbs maintain their genericity across fiction genres irrespective of the publisher. The mean length of a prototypical fiction blurb is around 150 words because it is supposed to present a simple overview of the plot, without revealing too many details, coupled with overtly expressed evaluation. Its conciseness serves as a curiosity arouser and it is primarily achieved by syntactic means. In contrast, linguistics blurbs exhibit a more noticeable variability, but that likewise can be explained in terms of their length-in-words values being in direct correlation with the book type. The total number of words employed is almost twice that of fiction blurbs, so a degree of discrepancy is probable. A prototypical text of this kind is approximately 270 words long because it should provide detailed information about the specialized subject matter and author of the book, such that it will appeal to a very specific audience (i.e., researchers and (under)graduate students). Its function is presumably more informative than persuasive, unlike that of a fiction blurb, although it does communicate positive evaluation as well.

Table 1. The distribution of text-length values in the sampled corpus

Book type/ genre	Publishing house	#of blurbs	#of words[4]	#of words in the longest blurb	#of words in the shortest blurb	Mean length of a blurb
Fiction (thriller novels)	*Penguin Random House*	10	1,434	176	108	143.4
	HarperCollins Publishers	10	1,413	186	104	141.3
I		20	2,847	186	104	142.35
Fiction (romance novels)	*Penguin Random House*	10	1,664	205	127	166.4
	HarperCollins Publishers	10	1,451	167	114	145.1
II		20	3,115	205	114	155.75
Academic (linguistics literature)	*Oxford University Press*	10	2,498	341	192	249.8
	Cambridge University Press	10	2,882	448	163	288.2
III		20	5,380	448	163	269
Total (I, II, III)		60	11,342	448	104	189.03

The promotional language of blurbs may be characterised as formulaic and repetitive partly because of the recurrent use of certain syntactic features. A particularly prominent feature is structural parallelism at the phrasal, clausal or sentential level. It is frequently employed in short review excerpts at

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4   Contractions and hyphenated compounds count as single words.

the beginning or end of these texts. In thriller and romance blurbs that might be in the form of relatively simple parallel or coordinated adjective phrases, like in examples (1a) and (1b), while in linguistics blurbs we observed this type of correlation in more complex nominal phrases that involve multiple modification, as in (2).

(1a) 'Shocking' *Daily Express*
'Stunning' C. L. Taylor
'Jaw-dropping' *Sunday Times*
'Engrossing' Rowan Coleman (TP9[5])

(1b) 'Wonderfully romantic and sumptuously atmospheric.' Alex Brown, author of *The Secret Orchard Cottage* (RH9)

(2) "A must-read for students and scholars who want to understand generative approaches to SLA." Susan Gass, Michigan State University

"A positive and systematic reminder that linguistic theory does have to be central [in SLA]." Rosamond Mitchell, University of Southampton

"An up-to-date and readable text suitable for classroom and non-classroom use that will both inform and provoke. Highly recommended." Bill VanPatten, Michigan State University (LO5)

Parallelism in these excerpts acts as a pragmatic means of intensification in the expression of positive evaluation, and it is usually realized through repetition of individual words, phrases, phrase types, tenses, word order, and similar features. However, it is also present in the central, descriptive sections of blurbs, which exhibit similar patterns of mirrored structuring at the clausal and sentential level. In fiction blurbs this is observable in short sentences that create suspense or arouse the reader's curiosity, followed by plotline elaboration, like in (3). Academic blurbs, on the other hand, exhibit a specific NP + VP$_{pres}$ pattern at the beginning of longer parallel clauses and sentences, such as *Dixon provides X* and *he addresses X* in (4), that report on the individual findings in the book. The focus here is on presenting information in a coherent and structured manner so as to appeal to the specialist reader.

(3) SHE CAN'T SAVE HER SISTER.
Journalist Madison Webb has covered dangerous stories before – but she never thought she'd be investigating her own sister's murder.
SHE CAN'T TRUST THE POLICE.
Refusing to accept that Abigail's death was an isolated crime, Madison uncovers evidence suggesting she was the third victim in a series of killings [...].
SHE CAN EXPOSE THE TRUTH.
[...] If Madison pursues her quest for justice, she will face the consequences... (TH7)

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5 The sampled texts were coded in the following manner: the first letter signals the book type/genre, the second one the publisher, and the final number is the order in which the texts were excerpted in the individual subcorpora. Detailed bibliographic information is provided at the end of the paper.

(4)   In *Basic Linguistic Theory* R. M. W. Dixon provides a new and fundamental characterization of the nature of human languages [...]. In three clearly written and accessible volumes, he describes how best to go about doing linguistics, [...]. In the first book he addresses the methodology for recording, analysing, and comparing languages. He argues that grammatical structures and rules should be worked out inductively [...]. He shows how the grammars and words of one language may be compared to others [...], explains the methods involved in cross-linguistic parametric analyses, and describes how to interpret the results. (LO7)

The examples also show that parallelism is closely connected to the use of ellipsis in blurbs, which greatly contributes to the formulaic nature of their language. As previously mentioned, ellipsis approximates blurbs to advertisements and simultaneously to real speech, but it also inadvertently adds to their syntactic complexity at the phrasal and clausal level. As a form of syntactic 'deviation', ellipsis foregrounds relevant information for informativity and effectiveness, creating a conspicuous communicative message. It is employed in both fiction and linguistics blurbs, although to a varying degree and the means by which it is realized may differ. The structural elements most frequently reduced are subject and operator, as in (1a) *'[It/The thriller/The plot is] Engrossing'*. This type of initial ellipsis is particularly prevalent in the fiction subcorpus. Alternatively, initial ellipsis may be realized by omitting the subject only, like in (5), and the reader is expected to pragmatically supplement the missing information.

(5a)   'Truly wonderful... [The novel] Should be compulsory reading for anyone contemplating tying the knot' *Daily Mail* (RP1)

(5b)   '... [The handbook] explains why administrators promulgate instructional programs in which forgetting exceeds learning, [...] and materials and assessment ignore research.' (LC7)

Another characteristic pattern in these texts is the reduction of dependent clauses in initial, post-modifying or final positions. In linguistics blurbs, for instance, sentences have a more complex structure and they frequently begin with *ed*-clauses or detached predicative noun phrases, as in examples (6a) and (6b), where the missing elements are easily recoverable. Likewise, sentences may be similarly condensed with initial and final *ing*-clauses, like in (7). In contrast, because fiction blurbs are predominantly shorter and their sentences structurally simpler, non-finite clauses and detached predicatives are less often employed in these positions.

(6a)   Written in an accessible style, this book provides both a guide to one of the most vibrant areas of research in natural language and an account of how this area of study is developing. (LO10)

(6b)   The first systematic analysis of the Windows Approach, it will be of interest to students and researchers in many disciplines, [...]. (LC1)

(7a) Drawing on findings from a broad range of disciplines [...], Iris Berent explores these questions and proposes a new hypothesis about the architecture of the phonological mind. (LC4)

(7b) The book assumes some non-technical knowledge of linguistics, but important concepts are clearly introduced and defined throughout, making it a valuable resource [...]. (LO5)

However, both subcorpora exhibit clause reduction in post-modifying positions. The pronoun and operator are regularly omitted in restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, which are then realized as *ed*-clauses, like in (8). Alternatively, other non-finite structural types, such as *to*-clauses in (9), are employed, which again speaks to the blurb writer's preference for condensed structures, in accordance with spatial constraints and the need to convey an effective message.

(8a) 'A terrific plot, matched by the quality of the writing and superbly paced tension' *The Times* (TP1)

(8b) "... a must-read for anyone concerned with the language–thought interface." Asifa Majid, Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (LC6)

(9a) 'The perfect book to curl up with' *Heat* (RH9)

(9b) "This book is one of the most significant contributions in lexical and discourse semantics to emerge in recent years. [...]" James Pustejovsky, Brandeis University (LC2)

The promotional language of fiction blurbs resembles spoken language more closely than that of linguistics blurbs because the pervasive parallelism and ellipsis are coupled with fragmentary sentences and sentence fragments in these texts. We recorded several sentences beginning with conjunctions *but*, *and* or *because* in both thriller and romance subcorpora, such as those in (10), characteristic of informal, discontinued speech. There were also a number of incomplete clauses and sentences marked by punctuation ellipsis (i.e., the three dots), as in (11). Likewise, examples (1) and (9a) show that numerous dangling sentence fragments are used to express subjective evaluation, but they are common in the description sections as well, like in (12).

(10) Now, sixteen years later, he is about to be executed. But Tessa feels no relief. Because someone is planting black-eyed Susans outside her window. Someone is sending her daughter sinister messages. And there's a lawyer telling her the man about to be put to death is innocent. (TP1)

(11a) Most days she can barely remember who she is... (TH4)

(11b) Before long they will learn that life has other ideas... (RP1)

(12) Cait and Matt have been married for thirty years. They are rock solid. An inspiration to others. Stuck together like glue. But Cait can't shake off the feeling that something is missing. (RH10)

The function of these syntactic features is to provide a fragmented, and yet sufficiently coherent overview of the book so that the blurb does not reveal too much, but still pique the reader's interest. As such, they are not typical of linguistics blurbs which mostly replicate formal written language with longer, complete sentences, reflecting the subject matter and academic community they are aimed at. That being said, these texts do employ sentence fragments, but to a lesser degree and primarily in the evaluation sections, such as in example (2).

However, a feature that serves as a curiosity arouser and was observed prominently in both fiction and linguistics subcorpora is questions. They are used to engage the reader by presenting cues about the content of the book, and they usually frame the text by being strategically placed at the beginning or end of the description section. In fiction blurbs questions may be rhetorical or they may reveal certain details of the plot, like in (13). In linguistics blurbs, on the other hand, they are mainly in the form of research questions, such as those in (14), which are directly related to the subject matter. These examples further show that blurb writers often use multiple parallel questions as engagement markers to add to the impact of the communicative message.

(13) Would you give first love a second chance?
      Susannah and Rob were childhood sweethearts. But in time, they broke up. [...] Until they meet at a wedding and the memories come flooding back. Suddenly, their hearts are in turmoil. Has the perfect love each now remembers been given back to them? Or should they simply walk away and quietly carry on with their lives? (RP2)

(14) This book offers an introduction to the analysis of meaning. [...] To communicate is to convey meaning – but what is meaning? How do words combine to give us the meanings of sentences? And what makes a statement ambiguous? These questions and many others are addressed in Paul Elbourne's fascinating guide. (LO6)

As a prominent promotional strategy in advertising, questions are an additional point of similarity between blurbs and advertisements (Gea Valor 2005: 60). However, the few noted instances of imperatives, a common means of establishing direct communication with potential buyers, indicate that there are also significant differences and that the former should not be labelled purely as short ads for books (cf. Ibid.: 56). Blurbs, and especially linguistics blurbs, address their target audience in a more specific, indirect manner, either by praising the qualities of the book itself or identifying particular groups of readers that may find it interesting, engaging or in some other way useful.

The formality of the promotional language of linguistics blurbs and its resemblance to academic English is particularly reflected in its use of the passive voice. Unlike fiction blurbs which mainly employ active forms, except in evaluative *ed*-clauses like in (8a), those written for linguistics literature exhibit a distinct pattern of passivisation. These constructions are either realized as agentless or *by*-passives, reduced or fully formed, and they contribute to the impersonal tone of the texts, as examples in (15) demonstrate.

(15a) The analysis is further extended to examine vagueness and gradability associated with particular classes of determiner phrases, showing that the correspondences that exist between the major adjectival scale structure classes and subclasses of determiner phrases can also be captured within the DelTCS system. (LO3)

(15b) "[...] An amazing achievement, this book is to be read and enjoyed by anyone with a deep curiosity about the fundamental nature and source of nature's biggest gift to our species: language." Paul Smolensky, [...] (LC4)

However, the most notable syntactic feature in all sampled texts is their phrasal configuration. In order to arrive at a relatively precise, but desirably positive and effective description of a book, blurb writers employ a range of nominal, adjectival, verbal, and adverbial phrases varying in complexity (Bacić 2020: 327-328). Reminiscent of advertising discourse, such structures allow for creative use of language by making available a number of syntactic slots to accomplish product-detailing (Leech 1966: 84). The slots may be filled with multiple pre- and post-modifiers of attributive and designative type, linearly arranged or inserted in shorter phrases, to achieve a 'matryoshka-doll'-like compression of form and meaning.[6] The headword in these complex phrases is most often a noun, so nominals feature prominently in both fiction and linguistics blurbs. We did also record a significant number of adjective phrases in the former and especially verb phrases in the latter subcorpus.[7] In general, complex phrases are most frequent in linguistics blurbs, but that is in proportion to their text-length values. The modifiers in all the phrases primarily function as means of semantic or pragmatic intensification in the expression of positive evaluation. The pre-modifiers are usually adjectives and adjective phrases, adverbs or even noun phrases, like in (16). Alternatively, pre-modification may involve the use of compounds, either simple as *common-sense* in (16c) and *single-author* in (16d) or complex ones as *sore-stomach-laughing* in (17). Such *ad hoc*, vividly descriptive compounds are mainly employed in fiction blurbs.

(16a) 'A strikingly fresh thriller... ingeniously realized' *SUNDAY TIMES* (TH7)

(16b) 'The number one feel-good read of Christmas 2018' DINAH JEFFERIES (RP7)

(16c) 'A refreshingly common-sense approach to linguistic analysis.' Lise M. Dobrin, University of Virginia (LO7)

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6   Adding to the observed compression is the frequent use of ellipsis, particularly in fiction blurbs, to form stand-alone sentence fragments out of these constructions, such as in examples (16a) and (16b). In order to present our findings coherently, we treated ellipsis separately at the beginning of this section as a distinct process of omission which is closely related not only to phrasal, but also clausal configuration, sentential fragmentation, and parallelism. We refer the reader to the discussion of the initial ellipsis pertaining to examples (1) and (2).

7   It should be noted that the prevalence of noun and adjective phrases in blurbs is to be expected since nouns and adjectives function as predicates and therefore, when purposefully used as fragments, can serve as an adequate substitution for full clauses.

(16d) "This is a superb one-volume, single-author introduction to endangered languages. Full coverage, [an] accessible style, and illuminating examples will make this volume invaluable to novice fieldworkers and wonderfully resonant to veterans." NANCY C. DORIAN, [...][8] (LC8)

(17) 'Sparky, smart, sore-stomach-laughing kind of read' *Fabulous* (RH4)

On the other hand, the post-modifiers are predominantly realized as prepositional phrases or finite/non-finite clauses, like in (18). They enable the blurb writer to add further relevant information about the content of the book, while simultaneously emphasizing its qualities.[9] The examples show that post-modification in linguistics blurbs is more elaborate than in fiction blurbs because it involves a greater degree of phrasal embedding. Likewise, an additional feature that separates linguistics blurbs in terms of their phrasal complexity is the use of nominals as subject complements/predicatives to provide information about the author's credentials, given the value that the target audience places on academic expertise. These phrases usually employ coordination, as in (19), to list the individual qualifications.

(18a) 'A thriller writer in a class of his own' FINANCIAL TIMES (TH3)

(18b) 'An emotionally sure-handed novel exploring harrowing terrain with deft sensitivity' *Sunday Times* (RP10)

(18c) 'This delightful collection of fascinating anecdotes, keen observations about the ways things are pronounced and erudite reflections from his long and distinguished career as a phonetician will ensure that John Wells continues to be an inspiration not just for established linguists and students of phonetics [...].' David Deterding, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (LC3)

(19) William Croft is Professor of Linguistics at the University of New Mexico and author of *Radical Construction Grammar* (OUP 2001) (LO4)

In effect, multiple coordination may be said to characterize both fiction and linguistics blurbs, as demonstrated in numerous previous examples. We observed instances of such correlation between individual words or shorter phrases embedded within more complex ones, modifiers, conjoined predicates, clauses, and so forth. Coordination contributes to the formulaic character of these texts because it creates parallel slots for multiple evaluative expressions. Together with other syntactic features, it allows for template formation which

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8 (16d) is listed in this set of examples because it illustrates the individual complex phrases, such as *a superb, one-volume, single-author introduction to endangered languages*, which in linguistics blurbs are more often employed in full-fledged clauses rather than as ellipted fragments, like in (16c). This practice contributes to the evident formality and elaborateness of the language in these texts as opposed to that of fiction blurbs.

9 It is worth noting here that the types of pre- and post-modifiers identified in complex phrases in blurbs are entirely expected in any context, given that this applies to phrasal modification in English overall. Likewise, some other features and constructions discussed in the paper, such as ellipsis or fragmentary sentences, are not specific to the blurb genre per se. What does, however, affirm their salience in blurbs is the frequency of usage and their amalgamation and clustering in shaping a very specific communicative message.

greatly facilitates the writing of individual instantiations of the blurb genre. The syntactic mechanisms at work in these recyclable constructions are therefore fully utilized in the fulfilment of its communicative purpose.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper we have outlined the syntactic repertoire of promotional English in fiction and academic book blurbs. More specifically, we've identified patterns of usage of salient syntactic features and accounted for the similarities and differences in this text-internal aspect of blurbs. The analysis shows that their formulaic language exhibits distinctive form-function correlations at the syntactic level. Blurb writers aim for an effective use of structural formations in expressing positive description of a book, which necessarily results in the recurrence of certain features or feature clusters that fulfil similar functions. However, individual instantiations differ in prototypicality as they also display variability in text-length values and usage frequency of prominent features. Fiction blurbs mainly replicate the conciseness of spoken language, while linguistics blurbs more closely resemble formal written language. They don't exhibit notable differences when it comes to the thriller/romance subgenre or practices of individual publishing houses, but the defining variable in shaping their syntactic form is the overall book type/genre (and by extension subject matter and target audience). Although their variability is not highly marked, it does indicate a degree of controlled flexibility and dynamism in the generic integrity of the blurb genre. Our findings therefore confirm that the syntactic level of these texts is contextually motivated as well.

The study raises further methodological issues in examining how syntactic and possibly other lexico-grammatical features are used in patterned ways in genres. As previously stated, the analysis was performed manually and involved multiple readings of the sampled texts for the identification of salient features based on their recurrence. Even with advancements in corpus linguistics, genres remain multidimensional constructs requiring qualitative methodology. Thus, in order to arrive at a more comprehensive account of blurbs, it was necessary to make choices within the constraints of this project. An additional difficulty was gauging which syntactic features specifically were characteristic of their promotional language as opposed to regular features of standard English, so identifying salience was crucial. Future synchronic and diachronic research should focus on overcoming such methodological challenges, as well as exploring how the communicative rationale behind blurbs correlates with supplementary factors in shaping other levels of their textual form.

Finally, it is imperative to recognize that the study of linguistic profiles of genres is fundamentally important for the study of language use, both from a theoretical and applied perspective. English of the 21st century is a language of genre(s), i.e., it is realized in and through genres. The increasing 'generification' of contemporary language, and particularly English as the global *lingua franca*, requires the adoption of a multidimensional genre-based framework in investigating the complex and still under-researched linguistic realities of the 21st century.

Corpus

Thriller novels, *Penguin Random House*

TP1: J. Heaberlin, *Black-Eyed Susans: A Novel of Suspense*, 2016. TP2: C. Douglas, *Do Not Disturb*, 2018. TP3: A. Clark-Platts, *Bitter Fruits*, 2015. TP4: M. J. Arlidge, *The Doll's House*, 2015. TP5: K. Perry, *Girl Unknown*, 2016. TP6: L. Nugent, *Lying in Wait*, 2017. TP7: F. Francis, *Refusal: A Dick Francis Novel*, 2014. TP8: C. Hunter, *In the Dark*, 2018. TP9: N. Ellwood, *My Sister's Bones*, 2017. TP10: G. Hurwitz, *Orphan X*, 2016.

Thriller novels, *HarperCollins Publishers*

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Милица С. Бацић

СИНТАКСИЧКЕ ОДЛИКЕ ПРОМОТИВНОГ ЈЕЗИКА У ТЕКСТОВИМА НА КОРИЦАМА КЊИГА

Резиме

У раду се бавимо компаративном анализом синтаксичког нивоа промотивног језика у текстовима на корицама књижевних дела и научне литературе. Основни циљ истраживања јесте да идентификујемо типичне синтаксичке одлике и испитамо сличности и разлике у њиховој употреби у текстовима на корицама трилера, љубавних романа и лингвистичке литературе на енглеском језику. Анализа показује да њихов формулаични језик испољава одређене жанровске обрасце и корелације облика и функције у својој синтаксичкој сложености. У исказивању позитивног описа књиге писци ових текстова редовно упошљавају структурни паралелизам, елипсу, сложене синтагме са вишеструком модификацијом, уметнуте синтагме и клаузе, координацију и друга средства структурне редукције. Међутим, индивидуалне реализације овог жанра такође испољавају систематичну варијабилност у дужини и учесталости типичних одлика, при чему текстове за књижевна дела карактерише концизност говорног језика, а текстови за научну литературу подражавају формални писани језик. Стога закључујемо да њихов генерички интегритет испољава условну флексибилност на синтаксичком нивоу у зависности од типа/жанра књиге као дистинктивне варијабле. Истраживање такође потврђује да је испитивање лингвистичких профила жанрова од кључне важности за испитивање употребе језика, како из теоријске, тако и примењене перспективе. Појачана 'жанрификација' савременог језика, а нарочито енглеског као глобалног *lingua franca*, захтева усвајање жанровски заснованог мултидимензионалног оквира у истраживању сложених лингвистичких реалности XXI века.

Кључне речи: анализа жанра, текст на корицама књиге, промотивни језик, синтаксичка одлика, савремени енглески језик