

IDENTIFICATION OF DISCOURSE MOVES OF ONLINE PAKISTANI TEXTBOOKS' BLURBS

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Abstract

The genre-based studies have focused on the different types of generic features of academic and non-academic texts. Book blurbs have gained attention in recent years and scholars across the world are struggling to find the rhetorical features of electronic or printed blurbs, however; to the best of authors' knowledge, no such studies have been conducted on Pakistani book blurbs. The present study focuses on online Pakistani textbook blurbs in five disciplines of engineering, art & architecture, history and Pakistan studies, anthropology and business & Management books. The self-compiled corpus of 60 online blurbs has been analyzed against the model of Orna-Montesinos (2012). The researchers found almost the similar patterns of generic structure in online Pakistani textbook blurbs as were found in Orna-Montesinos (2012). The results revealed that the praise for the book and information regarding the author are most occurring moves in the data. The study is, of course, limited in its scope because only 60 blurbs from five categories of the textbooks, is not larger data to derive generalizations. The researchers suggest that the results may be verified through the larger corpus in Pakistan; nonetheless, the study is a valuable contribution in the field of genre studies on blurbs in Pakistan.

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1.Introduction

Text has been analyzed from various perspectives since long. The use of specific words and specific linguistic items gained attention in 1990s under the paradigm of register analysis. Later, the discourse and register analyses have paved way to more sophisticated scholastic studies, i.e. genre analysis focusing on the rhetorical patterns of the text. In recent times, genre studies have been much focused upon and researchers have been trying to highlight the generic and rhetorical features of academic and non-academic texts. A genre represents “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some sets of communicative purposes” (Swales, 2004)

Every text has some specific communicative purpose that takes it into some larger category which has performed the similar communicative purpose. Similar is the case with communicative event and the targeted members. So it is also possible that a single text may fall under the category of many genres. Similarly, book blurbs are usually categorized as promotional genre as well as the informative one.

The present study attempts to unearth the underlying move structure of blurbs. It aims to find out the generic features (first started by Swale, 2004) of online Pakistani book blurbs following the model proposed by Orna Montesinos (2012). It also seeks to observe the adjectives and modifiers which have been used as promotional features in online Pakistani book blurbs. The present work seeks to answer whether Orna-Montesinos’s (2012) claim (all the book blurbs share the similar rhetorical/structural features) is applicable on Pakistani online textbooks’ blurbs. It tries to observe whether the claim is applicable to only engineering and architectural textbooks or it can be generalized to other disciplines of textbooks’ category as well?

The present study has focused on the book blurbs of Pakistani textbooks which are available online. Textbooks are chosen because they have been written in academic and professional setting. It can help the prospective authors to organize the structure of their book blurbs in a way which may attract the audience or reader.

1. Literature Review

Rhetorical patterns are being studied since long under the paradigm of genre studies, Bakhtin’s (1986) essay on speech genre, finding some similarities between literary genre and discourse in general to relate the two, paved the way for literary works on generic structures.

Book blurbs are considered a separate genre which provides information about the book to promote it. This genre has gained much focus in recent times. Wolper (2001) holds that a blurb is “flamboyant advertisement; an inspired testimonial; fulsome praise” of the book (p. 21). Gea-Valor (2007) observes that publishing houses seek to send only one message to the potential reader, i.e. the book has many credits and the author is a good writer. Further, she explains that this genre is characterized by the purpose of attracting the reader to buy the book by describing its contents and by praising its qualities.” (p.61)

The studies on the rhetoric of book blurbs can be traced back to early 1990s when Eaglstein and Berman (1990) studied blurbs of sociology, education and psychology textbooks against Bingley’s definition of blurbs. They tried to observe the contents of blurbs against Bingley’s

definition. They termed the field of study as Blurbology; a scientific study of blurbs. However, to the best of authors' knowledge this term did not appear in the literature again. They observed that all the blurbs contain information concerning the praise of the book and matter.

Bhatia (2004) defines genre as having similar communicative purpose "nature of genre is primarily characterized by the communicative purpose(s) that it is intended to fulfill. The communicative purpose will determine the structure of genre" to explain his definition he analyzed 2 blurbs 1 from fiction book and the other from academic textbook and identified 6 moves structure; 1-headlines, 2-justifying the book 3 appraising the book 4- establishing credentials 5 endorsements, 6 targeting market. He concluded that both the blurbs fulfill similar communicative purpose and appear having similar lexico grammatical realizations. Nonetheless, he found that there are differences in the nature of nominalization especially adjectives. Bhatia's finding is contrary to Eaglstein and Berman's (1990) claim that the subject matter of the book does not affect the contents of blurbs.

Gea-Valor (2005) analyzed 60 online blurbs and found three move structure 1-description of the book 2-evaluation of the book and 3-information about the author. Next in 2007, Gea-Valor and Ros analyzed 100 blurbs from 1940 to 2007 and found variation in structural patterns. In their recent data they found five move pattern 1-catch phrase 2-description 3-appraisal 4-author credentials 5-technical information. They found that to face the needs and challenges of marketing in the fast moving world of today blurbs have undergone the change to meet those needs.

Jalilifar (2008) did a contrastive study on Persian and English book blurbs to identify the discourse patterns, linguistic and non-linguistic features and to locate the disciplinary and interdisciplinary similarities and differences. He found some differences across languages and suggested that these differences exhibit the underlying social structures of Persian and English societies. While talking about cross-disciplinary differences, he observed that linguistics and literature blurbs seem to represent different genre rather than the single genre. Onder (2013) tried to highlight the generic structure and promotional elements in 95 online book blurbs taken from Amazon UK and Okuoko Turkey and found that Amazon book blurbs are written in 6 move structure; complimenting the author, book description, justifying the book by establishing a niche, book promotion, author's background and author's website/blog while Turkish blurbs have 5 move structure; complimenting the author, book description, involving the reader in the text, book promotion and author's background. He also analyzed the promotional elements present in the book blurbs and found that the book blurbs promote the book by using favorable expressions in the text. He compared the blurbs across cultures.

Orna-Montesinos studied this academic genre in 2012 in connection with the professional one. He studied the schematic structure of 236 blurbs of engineering and architectural textbooks and found that the blurbs perform dual communicative purpose i.e. providing the information regarding the book and promoting it among the professionals. He calls for the re-evaluation of the blurbs as they address to two discourse communities i.e. the students and the professionals and observes that the communicative purpose of the blurbs is partially academic.

2. Methodology

60 online Pakistani textbooks blurbs, published by Oxford University Press Pakistan and Feroz-ul-lukhaat, have been collected for the present study. Total data consisted on 28,749 words which is approximately 379.15 words per blurb. The samples were chosen according to the availability from these categories; Engineering books, Art & architecture books, History and Pakistan Studies books, Anthropology books and business & Management books. Both the publishers are considered as standard publishing houses of the country and they offer complete academic and professional details of the author and his/her valuable work along with the particulars of the book.

Two trained coders have tagged all text files according to Orna Montesinos (2012) model. Further, the moves and the steps in online Pakistani textbooks' blurbs have been analyzed through automation as well to make the results more consistent. Antmover (software) has been used for the purpose of computerized analysis. To see the promoting features it is necessary to analyze descriptive elements of online book blurbs through moves analysis.

Sample

The choice of samples was based upon availability, since, with some rare exceptions, the publisher offered online blurbs for the above mentioned time-span. However, among the limitations of the corpus selection it is to be mentioned that electronic blurbs have been taken into account while the traditional blurbs i.e. published on the back cover of the book, are not included in corpus. As after the human coding, the computerized automation procedure for moves analysis has also been conducted. Moreover, both the publishing houses are considered as most cited publishing houses for getting academic and professional information in Pakistan.

3. Data Analysis

The data has been analyzed following the model presented by Orna-Montesinos in 2012 in his work on textbook blurbsto answer the research questions presented in the introduction. Based on the model (Orna-Montesinos, 2012), the purpose of this paper is to explore a corpus of textbook blurbs in order to provide evidence of the similar characteristics of the textbook genre presented in the online blurbs. This paper has focused on textbooks of five disciplines i.e. Engineering books, Art & architecture books, History and Pakistan Studies books, Anthropology books and business & Management books. For the present work a corpus of the online blurbs of 60 textbooks published between 2010 and 2018 by Oxford University Press Pakistan and Feroz-ul-Lughat Publishing houses has been compiled.

General pattern of Pakistan online Textbook Blurbs

General pattern of book blurbs followed by these publishing houses is given below

- General information about the book and author
- Key features of the book
- Description of the textbook
- Readership
- Contents of the book
- Author information: professional description and academic qualification

The blurbs facilitate the prospective buyers as well as book-information collector with all necessary information regarding the book and the authors. The rhetorical analyses showed

	54	90	30	50	53	98	11	20
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As shown in Table 2, of the 60 textbook blurbs analyzed, 54 of them (90%) are written by single author, and only 11 of them (20%) are coauthored by different scholars. Authors' professional insight is given in 53 Of them (98) whereas academic qualification is given in 30 of them (50%). It shows that giving the academic qualification is not considered as necessary to mention in providing online Pakistani book blurbs.

Move 2: Readership

Table 3 exhibits the results of readership move in the data.

Table 3: Number and frequency of Readership in Online Pakistani Textbook blurbs

Text files	Move 2: Readership		For students		For professionals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
60	32	53	30	94	28	87

When analyzing the 'readership' move of the textbooks discussed, It is found that the 94 % of them are targeted to an exclusively educational audience (students, graduate and undergraduate and/or academics lecturers, historians, libraries, etc.), and 87% address to a mixed audience of both students and professionals. But overall this move is present only in 32(53%) text book blurbs. Pakistani textbook authors seem to be addressing a variety of readers and therefore make a conscious effort to try to reach as wide an audience as possible, thus responding to the promotional character of the blurb genre.

Move 3: Presenting the book

Table 4: Number and frequency of Move 3 in Online Pakistani Textbook blurbs

Text files	Presenting the text book		Contents		Facilitating comprehension		Outlining the purpose	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
60	60	100	42	70	53	88	50	83

The purpose of the blurb is mainly to present the textbook as it serves also the purpose of promotion as well. It aims to show the list of topics, beneficial features for readers and the main purposes of the book so that it would become fruitful for the readers. For this purpose third move is present in every blurb of Pakistani text book. The first step, i.e. 'contents', is present in 42 books which are 70% of the corpus in this sample. The second step is 'facilitating the comprehension' which is present in 53 book blurbs which is 88% of

the data. The third move, i.e. ‘outlining the purpose’ is present in 50 blurbs which is 83% in the corpus.

Move 4: Promoting the book

The table below shows the number and percentages of the move which promoted the book.

Table 5: Number and frequency of Move 4 in Online Pakistani Textbook blurbs

Text files	Promoting the text book		Claiming the value		Showing the credentials		Responding to the profession	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
60	56	93	40	67	38	63	33	59

Promoting the text book is not only for the purpose of professional recognition, it also shows that the author him/herself give weightage to his text in a beneficial manners for the readers. This move is present in 53 book blurbs which are 98% of the corpus. The first step is present in 40 blurbs which is 67% of the data. This step claiming the value which is shown by updated edition or disciplinary importance of the book. The second step ‘showing the credentials’ is present in 38 book blurbs which is 63% in the corpus. It is shown by quotes or previous experience or work by author. The third step, i.e. ‘responding to the profession’ is present in 53 book blurbs which are 59% of the corpus. It is shown by disciplinary value or problem solving given by the author.

This corpus analysis of book blurbs clearly shows the claim set by Orna-Montesinos (2012) that the genre of text book blurbs have hybrid characteristics across the culture. Moreover, this category has promotional element as well as claimed by Bhatia (2004).

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to explore the rhetorical pattern of the textbook blurb, in five particular disciplines. It reveals that online Pakistani textbook blurbs have two obligatory moves i.e. ‘authorship’ which is move one and ‘description of the book’ which is move third. On the other hand, ‘readership’ move second and ‘promotion of the book’ move fourth are optional moves. But the overall pattern of Pakistani online book blurbs follows the Orna (2012) model in general, however; some variances on the criteria of sequence have been found. The information given in blurbs provides compact view about the author and book. Promotional feature is also present in the online Pakistani textbook blurbs and the blurbs are found to be a rich source of information for the target audience/readers before buying the book.

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