

The linguistic analysis of Turkish novels' Blurbs: A genre based study

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to make a linguistic analysis of the specifically chosen Turkish novels' blurbs. This study focused on the blurbs of 10 novels in different genres involving Psychology, Sufism, Tragedy, Biography, History, Literary, Thriller & Adventure, Self-Improvement, Romance and Horror. In terms of communicative purpose and linguistic analysis of rhetorical and lexico-grammatical choices, the methodologies of Selinker (1972,), Lackstrom (1973), Trimble (1974), Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) and consequently their connection with the advertising discourse were applied to the corpus consisting of 10 Turkish novels' blurbs. In the first stage, for delimiting the scope of the study, domain-specific corpus was determined. Next, the study was devoted to exploring the rhetorical structure of blurbs from a genre analysis perspective (Swales, 1990; Bathia, 1993) to identify their communicative purpose. Furthermore, linguistics analysis in regard to lexico-grammatical features and the relation between the form of linguistic resources and the functional aspects they textualize in discourse were focused. The results showed that book blurbs formed a specific genre characterized by a certain communicative purpose. In the lights of the findings, it was found that the use of specific linguistic and discursive conventions demonstrated some basic characteristics of advertising discourse.

Keywords: Genre Analysis; Book Blurbs; Lexico-Grammatical Linguistic Features; Communicative Purpose; Advertising Discourse

1. Introduction

Genre-based studies are generally focused on different types of professional and academic texts to determine their communicative purposes, generic structure and linguistic features. According to Bhatia (2004:57), genres are identified at levels in the form of super-genres or sub-genres. Most of these super genres can be regarded as colonies of closely related genres, which represent broadly similar communicative purposes. As a subcategory of the genres, promotional genres including advertisements, promotional letters, and book blurbs have an overlapping communicative purpose of promoting a product or a service to a potential customer. The promotional use of blurbs is well documented (Bhatia, 2004; Gesuato, 2004) since the genre's main purpose is not to inform readers but to market the publication and make it 'attractive to buy' (Cacchiani2007, p. 5).

It is a general fact that the publishing companies design their book covers carefully by spending much time and money on them to grab the attention of the available customers. Whenever we intend to buy a book, the first thing that we do is to glance at its front cover. But, if we want to have detailed information about the book that we are about to buy, we generally look at its back cover. These short descriptive texts are generally known as *blurbs*. The term '*blurb*' is defined as; publisher's short description of the contents of a book usually printed on the jacket or cover.

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(OALD, 1990). Blurbs not only give us the contents of a book, but they make an evaluation, recommendation and criticism of the books in terms of extracts taken from back covers in popular novels which complement the qualities of the books and the authors as well.

Limited research availability suggests that blurbs came into being 'with the advent of the mass-produced paperback' (Davis 1994:245). In the beginning of the 20th century, when the technique of blurbs especially became well known, the literature review studies were made and the word "blurb" was coined by Jackson (1999), Douglas (2001), Wolper (2004) and Trachtenberg (2003).

Having a unique, genre-specific structure and content, blurbs are characterized by contextually motivated language choices. Verdonk (2002) states that this kind of wording is motivated by the publisher's intention to persuade. An overall tendency is that the language of blurbs is considered to be particularly market-conscious and value-added (Zoglin and Harbison 1993; Davis 1994; Hiltunen 1996; Bhatia 1997; Douglas 2001; Verdonk 2002, etc.).

As characterized by loaded vocabulary choices, the so-called additive language, and emotive and forceful in style, blurbs can be studied by the genre analysts focusing on the specific features of language both qualitatively and quantitatively. A large-scale corpus based statistical analysis of a representative sample of the variety is undertaken when the analysis is done. For instance, the use of various tenses in the corpus or certain types of dependent clauses may be analyzed in regard to lexico-grammatical features. Linguistic analyses of the frequency of syntactic properties in different genres provide evidence for some of the intuitive or impressionistic statements. However, Linguistic analyses of syntactic properties give little information on the aspects of textualization and the communicative purpose. Therefore, the study may include discourse functions of the linguistic choices as well. As a result of surveying the relevant literature, there are many different studies carried out about the book blurbs of academic and professional genres. However, it seems that as a subcategory of academic genres the blurbs of novels, especially in Turkish, are not further thought. That's why, this study focuses on novel prefaces in written in different disciplines and scrutinizes both the generic and the linguistic characteristics.

More specifically, the aim of this research is to carry out a linguistic analysis of specifically chosen blurbs to see whether different genres make use of similar communicative purposes and how their purpose is reflected on the blurbs via language. On account of this notion, the research questions of the study as follows;

1. How do the lexico-grammatical choices and communicative purpose(s) operate on the specifically chosen Turkish novel blurbs in regard to discourse of advertising?
2. What are the specific linguistic features mostly used in Turkish novel blurbs?
3. Is it possible to apply the methodologies of Swales and Bathia to Turkish novels in different genres?
4. Do novels taken from different genres involving psychology, Sufism, tragedy, biography, history, literary, thriller & adventure, self-improvement, romance and horror show specific communicative purposes?

2. Materials and methods

The study comprises the analysis of 10 novels' blurbs taken from different genres including psychology, Sufism, tragedy, biography, history, literary, thriller & adventure, self-improvement,

romance and horror. The novels investigated consist of *Slender Love (Elif Gibi Sevmek)*(Öztekin, 2014), *A Psychologist's Secret Notes (Bir Psikiyatristin Gizli Defteri)*(Small, 2014), *Love in the Mirrors Hallway (Aynalar Koridorunda Aşk)* (Ulusoy, 2014), *Grief Drop (Katre-i Matem)*(Pala, 2009), *Blue and Black (Mai ve Siyah)* (Uşaklıgil, 1889), *Fog and Night (Sis ve Gece)* (Ümit, 1996), *The Kite Runner (Uçurtma Avcısı)*(Hosseini, 2003), *Piruze* (Akyüz, 2011), *Death in Taif (Taif'te Ölüm)* (Topuz, 1999) and *Power of Subconscious (Bilinçaltının Gücü)*(Murphy, 2009). As this study was a small-scaled one, only 10 novels' blurbs were investigated by combining the analysis of lexico-grammatical with discourse features to identify the communicative purpose. In regard to lexico-grammatical features, gerunds and infinitives were neglected in this research. Moreover, psychological and sociological aspects of genres and move structures of the book blurbs were not included.

The linguistic analysis of the blurbs of Turkish novels were followed by the works of Bathia (1993) and Swales (1990) in relation to their studies on genre analysis about English language use in academic and professional settings. The study made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. But, the quantitative findings of the study can be regarded as exemplary and therefore, they can serve as an inspiration for future researches, which rely on sufficient data and relevant statistical tools to make a generalization on the findings.

3. Data analysis

Based on the corpus of 10 sample blurbs of different Turkish novels gathered from 10 different genres, published in a time span of 15 years (1999-2014), this study was focused on analyzing the linguistic features and identifying communicative purpose and advertising discourse. First of all, lexico-grammatical features were investigated in the data analysis and then their contributions to communicative purpose of the study were determined. The three dimensions carried out in the study:

1. Parts of Speech (Adjective (Adj.) /Adverb (Adv.) /Noun/Pronoun (Pro.) /Verb/Conjunction (Conj.))
2. Use of Tenses (Simple Present/Present Progressive/Future/Simple Past/Past Progressive /Past Perfect/Modal)
3. Clause Types in Sentence Structure (Relative Clauses/Adverbial Clauses/That Clauses/Conditionals/Ellipsis)

Table 1. Parts of speech proportions in novels' blurbs

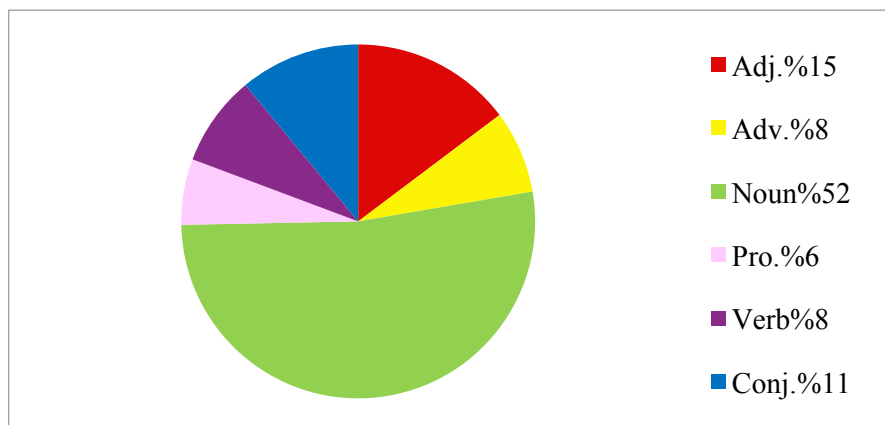
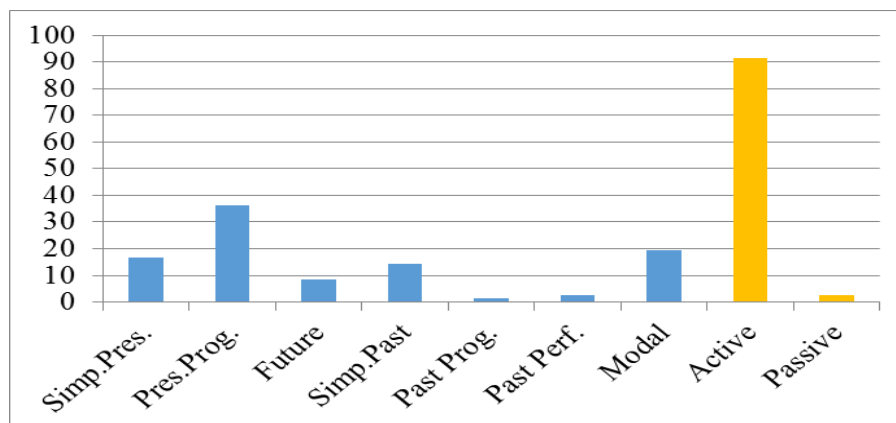


Table 2. The use of tenses

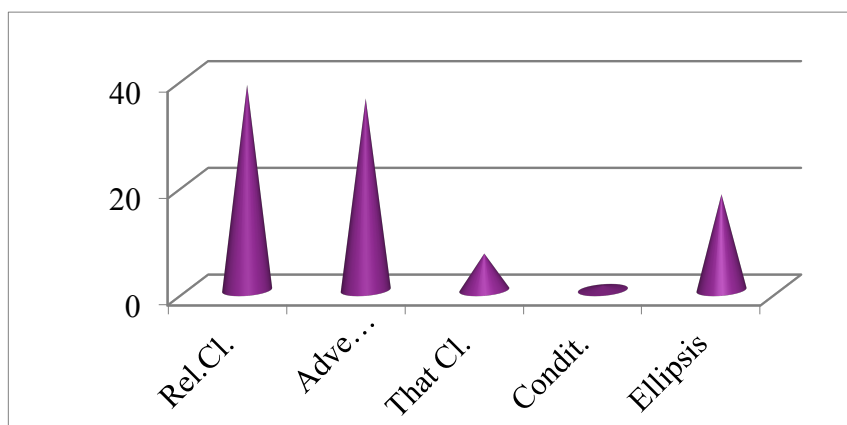


Simple Present:%16.8 Present Progressive:%36.1 Future:%8.4

Simple Past:%14.4 Past Progressive: %1.2 Past Perfect:%2.4

Modal:%19.2 Active:%91.5 Passive:%2.4

Table 3. Percentage of certain sentence types



Relative Clause: % 38.4 Adverbial Clause: %35.8 That Clause: %6.8 Conditional:%0.8 Ellipsis:%17.9

3.1. Linguistic conventions of blurbs

In regard to linguistic features presented in the tables above, it was found that Nouns and Adjectives, Present Progressive Active Verbs and Relatives and Adverbials were mostly used parts of speech elements in the specifically chosen blurbs. The adjectives such as “young (genç), colorful (renkli), dark (karanlık), pain (acı), happy (mutlu), famous (ünlü), rich (zengin), surprisingly (şaşırtıcı), funny (komik), weird (tuhaf), luxurious (lüks), white (beyaz), old (yaşlı), five thousand (beş yüz), overbearing (baskıcı), ancient (eski), impressive (etkileyici) etc.” were used for the purpose of providing an accurate description and image of the situation in the mind of the reader. That the thriller & adventure, horror and psychology books involving highly adjective uses showed the authors used bright, and intriguing adjectives to take the attention of the reader. In order to identify an abstract idea or a physical entity; nouns representing a person, place or a thing were the mostly used parts of speech terms detected from the back covers. For instance, nouns commonly used in the randomly chosen novels are “human (insan) and life (hayat)” which

have almost the same meaning in novels presented that authors tried to attribute to all the people having different status. Furthermore, the active use clearly indicates the plot and the current situations taking place in the novel by means of present progressives usage such as “ revealing (gözler önüne seriyor), pointing (dikkatimi çekiyor), being (oluyor), questioning (sorguluyor), following the path (yürüyorum), living (yaşıyor), unable to find (bulamıyor) etc.”. Additionally, for limiting and describing the meaning of noun phrase effectively, the authors have to use attractive and colorful language. To provide elaboration or background information about the topic, relative and adverbial clauses were considerably utilized in the back covers. The frequent use of such linguistic features as nouns, adjectives or adverbs, pronouns and active verbs remind the readers that the book was designed according to their demands. The findings of the study also indicate that all parts of speech elements display the promotional and persuasive function of the genre.

3.2. Discourse conventions of blurbs

Blurbs benefit from a wide range of strategies to grasp the attention of the readers and to praise the qualities of the book by promoting them in terms of *discourse conventions*. Discourse conventions can be regarded as the proper ways of expressing thoughts in a particular field. Some of the discourse strategies exploited in the blurbs could be complimenting the book, the author and both, the use of ellipsis and address form “you”.

Examples for praising the book:

1. “ Blue and Black which is considered as the beginning of the Turkish novel in Western sense and which is described by Tanpınar as ‘the first work speaking on behalf of Turkish generation’, has a different significance with its observations about press, literature and poetry life of that period.”- Blue and Black
2. “ When you read Love in the Mirror Hallway, you will discover how little you know about love and you will ask ‘ Can a man fill the heart of someone else?’ This is the story of the ones losing love and finding themselves.” –Love in the Mirrors Hallway
3. “Kite Runner reflecting the hidden side of an untold story in any novel before, is gradually revealing the destruction of the lands which has a rich culture and beauty.”- The Kite Runner

Examples for praising the author:

1. “ Again from the great author İskender Pala...”- Grief Drop
2. “ Sinan Akyüz, the author of best sellers such as Duplicate Loneliness, You do not have to love me and Stranger in my bed, is telling you the breath-taking story of Piruze who moved to Damascus after her early age marriage.”-Piruze
3. “Mustafa Ulusoy is x-raying the souls of each one of us. He is touching on our problems, heartbreaks, dead-ends, desperations, insurrections, desires and souls. He is interrogating the reason for our being as humans in this world and he does this by his line of verse flowing inside of us and coming from his heart“... ” –Love in the Mirrors Hallway

Examples for praising both the book and the author:

1. “A breathless chasing...an exciting adventure... Again from the great author İskender Pala...”-Grief Drop

2. "Sinan Akyüz, the author of best sellers such as Duplicate Loneliness, You do not have to love me and Stranger in my bed, is telling you the breath-taking story of Piruze who moved to Damascus after her early age marriage."-Piruze

Examples for ellipsis:

1. "Suddenly disappeared young girl: Mine...Conflict between the soldiers and civils... Lives broken into pieces by unconfirmed kills...Looking humanistically into the recent past of Turkey..."-Fog and Night

2. "You were not here at that time...I loved the rain most in my childhood...Whenever I faced with a problem, it would rain, touch and I would smell the petrichor... My fire would die down. Then I grew up... I saw your eyes, I burnt, and it was the first time that I didn't go out...I could only love you more than rain..."-Slender Love

3. "Wake up barman. It is tulip season! It is a deep love story and a terrifying murder within all these things... A breathless chasing, an exciting adventure... Again from the great author İskender Pala..."-Grief Drop

4. " Sinan Akyüz, the author of best sellers such as Duplicate Loneliness, You do not have to love me and Stranger in my bed, is telling you the breath-taking story of Piruze who moved to Damascus after her early age marriage."-Piruze

5. "The speaking story of father and son, which shows how much they love each other. All about fathers and sons; love, self-denying and lies"- The Kite Runner

Examples for Address form "you"

1. "While reading, you will find yourself thinking about suprisingly weird stuff those make you a human being. " -A Psychologist's Secret Notes

2. "You will witness political tricks, intrigues taken place in the Ottoman Palace and their effects on today's democracy, in addition to Mithat Pasha's political and personal life. " - Death in Taif

3. " Sinan Akyüz, the author of best sellers such as Duplicate Loneliness, You do not have to love me and Stranger in my bed, is telling you the breath-taking story of Piruze who moved to Damascus after her early age marriage."-Piruze

4. "Conscious and subconscious, how they work? " -Power of Subconscious

3.3. The communicative purpose

Codoban (2006: 152) defines the human communication as "influencing other minds through language". As can be seen from the examples, to perform their persuasive function and to promote their product widely, blurbs make use of many strategies and linguistic devices. In the lights of the findings, it was found that the linguistic and discourse conventions were mostly used to put a persuasive, promotional and informative effect on the reader. Considering the authors' intentions, persuasive and promotional function precedes the informative function in novels' genre. As a prerequisite for the communicative purpose, blurbs included in the study demonstrated that they constitute a specific genre by employing certain linguistic strategies in this textual type.

4. Conclusion

According to Swales (1990) Bhatia (1993: 16), "each genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discourse resources." To conclude, methods of Bhatia (1993) and Swales (1990) were applied to specific blurbs of Turkish novels. The frequent use of linguistic features such as intensive use of noun phrases, adjectives, relative clauses, adverbials, ellipsis and discourse functions consisting of complimenting the author and the book, the author and both, the use of ellipsis and address form "you" demonstrated the persuasive features and these devices were specifically used by the authors to grasp the attention of the reader by promoting that their products are feasible to his/her expectations. After analyzing a corpus of 10 different novel blurbs, this paper seems to present a proof that consists of a genre having its own communicative purpose. As a characteristic of advertising discourse, the analyzed novel blurbs indicated that the authors were trying to persuade the reader to buy the book by describing the content with the use of attentively chosen lexemes and grammatical structures to achieve their communicative purpose.

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