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Exploring the Patterns of Evaluative Language in Physics Blurbs: The Appraisal Strategies in Focus

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Abstract

The current study qualitatively examined blurbs in the discipline of physics which is perceived to be less infused with evaluative resources and more objective and impersonal in its textual argumentation. The study followed the appraisal framework proposed by Martin and White (2005) to see how interpersonal meaning is textually constructed in blurbs. Findings indicated that writers of the blurbs are more favorably disposed towards employing appreciation than other kinds of attitudinal resources. Two major waves of interpersonal meanings were observed in the hyper-Theme and hyper-New of blurbs. The latter appeared stronger because of the interpersonal contributory effect of the former. Findings showed that the ideational entity receiving initial thematic prominence in the beginning phase of the blurbs is the book rather than the author, leading to the major prominence given to the book, the dense accumulation of appreciation in comparison to other attitudinal resources, the grammatical passivity of blurbs' structures, and the realization of blurbs' discourse as a marked theme.

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1. Introduction

Research has showed that academic writing is regarded to be both informational and promotional (Hyland, 2004). That is, in addition to the informative aspect of academic texts for conveying information, these texts are known as a persuasive endeavor (Hyland, 2005) in terms of rhetorical strategies which writers make to convince their readers of their claims (Hyland, 2008; Mauranen, 1993).

Some academic texts are considered to be more promotional than informational as their primary goal is to increase selling the product of academic endeavors. As an example of these genres, blurbs, also classified under the category of academic introductions (Bhatia, 1997, 2004), are regarded as texts which are promotionally persuasive and academically informative. The promotional function of blurbs is accomplished via evaluative linguistic resources or persuasive linguistic markers to win the acquiescence of their readers. A good number of studies have explored whether evaluative linguistic resources or generic and rhetorical patterns are employed in the construction of blurbs to promote their rhetorical effectiveness and hence their persuasive force. Some of these studies have traced evaluation in non-electronic business or history blurbs in terms of finding out what area has made a greater use of blurbs (Cronin & La Barre, 2005), in the keywords of academic textbook blurbs across eight disciplines to demonstrate disciplinary preferences as well as sharing common keywords (Yang, 2012), in the blurbs of non-electronic academic textbooks with the aim of identifying generic moves (Basturkman, 2009; Iraj & Kuhi, 2013), and in fictional book blurbs and book reviews with an evaluative perspective in the prosodic patterning of meanings for negotiating our social relationship (Cacchiani, 2007; Hood, 2006; Lemke, 1998; Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005). Another study focused on electronic, fiction and non-fiction online blurbs of the best-known publishing houses for their generic and rhetorical patterns (Gea-Valor, 2005). Still, in a cross-cultural study, the non-electronic, fiction and academic book blurbs were explored for discursal patterns, linguistic features, and non-linguistic strategies

(Jalilifar & Banari, 2011). Recently, electronic fiction blurbs from Amazon UK and Okuoku TR were investigated for their generic structures (Onder, 2013).

Apart from the two studies mentioned above (i.e., Cacchiani, 2007; Cronin & La Barre, 2005), reviewing the related literature on blurbs has provided little direction regarding how evaluative linguistic resources might contribute to the effective formation of blurbs' advertising discourse. In other words, the literature on blurbs is mainly concerned with examining rhetorical conventions and schematic structures. That is, researchers have commonly sought for identifying rhetorical conventions of blurbs (Basturkman, 2009; Gea-Valor, 2005; Iraj & Kuhi, 2013) and determining cultural as well as disciplinary and interdisciplinary variations in the configuration of blurbs (Jalilifar & Banari, 2011; Kathpalia, 1997). Moreover, one of the major problems with the literature on blurbs is that previous studies are not based on a well-organized and comprehensive evaluative framework for investigating the variation of evaluative language with a disciplinary perspective. That is, evaluative language is merely confined to introducing the grammatical evaluative forms (e.g., Gea-Valor, 2005) or the percentage of adjectives and adverbs (e.g., Marciulioniene, 2012). In the current study, we seek to examine the role and function of evaluative resources in the logogenetic progression of rhetorical moves.

Analyzing the blurbs of a particular discipline (e.g., physics) would be fruitful because blurbs are expected to be mainly affected by the pure informative aspect of their respective discipline. For example, the study done by Yang (2012) demonstrated that the difference in the epistemological nature of soft and hard sciences results in the disciplinary variations in terms of keywords. As such, informed by disciplinary tendencies, the blurbs in the current study are examined in terms of how evaluative resources, if any, might be systematically utilized in their construction in only one discipline, that is, physics. The focus of the study, therefore, is broadly viewed as analyzing the blurbs in terms of their generic structures representing them for disseminating information and persuading readers. Meanwhile, the study is narrowly viewed with reference to

the possible linguistic choices and strategies available at the level of discourse-semantics realized and proposed particularly in terms of the appraisal framework.

The purpose of the study, therefore, is to find out how evaluative language is constructed in the possible existing rhetorical moves of physics blurbs as a representative discipline of hard science. From the generic analysis perspective, the study aims at finding out how rhetorically distinct moves are characterized considering the presence or absence of evaluative resources in their constructions. This study, thus, seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are distinct moves rhetorically constructed with reference to the existence of evaluative resources in physics blurbs?
2. What categories and sub-categories of the appraisal framework (i.e., attitude, engagement, and graduation) are responsible for the rhetorical construction of blurbs?
3. What kind of lexico-grammatical features are employed to realize an evaluative stance?
4. How are interpersonal, textual, and ideational meanings co-articulated to characterize the persuasive and informative functions of physics blurbs?

2. Theoretical Framework

Drawing on the conceptual discourse-semantic orientation, this study is based on the appraisal framework which is the language of expression of our attitudes, viewpoints, and personal judgments towards people, objects, and things. The appraisal framework entails three main categories including attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude refers to the positive and negative evaluation of emotional feelings and people's behavior, as well as the evaluation of things, that is, emotional (affect), ethical (judgment), and aesthetic (appreciation) positionings (Hood, 2004, 2006; Martin, 1997, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005; White, 2001a, 2001b). Engagement is concerned with the dialogistic nature of utterances in terms of dialogically expansive and contractive linguistic resources in the prosodic patterns of the textual structuring, including the sub-categories of disclaim, proclaim, entertain, and

attribute (Hood, 2004, 2010; Martin & White, 2005; White, 2001a, 2001b). The third category of the appraisal system is graduation which focuses on scaling up and scaling down according to the intensity and amount of the attitudinal evaluations or interpersonal engagement as well as the scalability operations in reference to the prototypicality or preciseness of an exemplary instance, referred to as *focus* in the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005).

Meanwhile, in order to explore the grammatical resources, based on which evaluative devices are encoded in the blurbs, the proposed grammatical framework by Hood (2010) was employed. The three grammatical resources introduced by Hood (2010) utilized for the grammatical analysis of the evaluative language of physics blurbs are adjectival qualities, nominalized qualities, and processes. Adjectival qualities are also broken down into attributes that follow linking verbs and epithets that precede and modify nouns. Two other grammatical resources adopting a positive and negative evaluative stance are nominalized qualities (e.g., gives **solutions** of **problems** with different types) and processes (e.g., The diagrams **guide** the reader) which are used for encoding attitudinal meanings in places where adjectival qualities are not used for any reason, but the writers intend to maintain the language of evaluation.

Moreover, the logogenetic progression of interpersonally evaluative resources is scrutinized in terms of ideational and textual metafunctions to see how they affect the rhetorical movement of interpersonal meanings. That is, we tend to know how these metafunctions, as a part of the discourse-semantic system, co-articulate complementarily with reference to the rhetorical logogeny of the blurb's interrelated moves in constructing the advertising discourse of blurbs. In this regard, the logogenetically methodological analysis used by Hood (2010) for exploring the co-articulation of metafunctions is taken up to analyze physics blurbs as a discourse entailing rhetorically interrelated moves.

3. Methodology

The study offers a thoroughly descriptive and explanatory analysis to verify a sample of

physics blurbs. It sheds light on how lexicogrammatical choices, as the realizations of metafunctions, construct the textuality of physics blurbs.

3.1. Materials Selection

In the process of undertaking the research, 30 physics blurbs, as the data of the study, were carefully examined for their rhetorical patterns, attitudinal and graduation resources, and ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Because the findings of these blurbs were similar and the methodological analysis was lengthy, the findings of only three analyzed physics blurbs are reported. Selection was made from those blurbs which were published from 2010 onward. The major source to find our required books was the central library of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. More than 90 originally English books were found in this searching process. One third of the books were randomly chosen for the final analysis. That is, to minimize the effect of subjective factors, random sampling was adopted.

To identify rhetorical moves, representing possible communicative purposes of the blurbs, some criteria were established. The first criterion was whether the move is internally referenced (i.e., the internal voice that has taken the responsibility of the proposition in the text) or externally referenced (i.e., the external voice that has taken the responsibility of the argumentation in the text) (White, 2001a). Meanwhile, moves which were internally referenced were checked out to see whether they are about the book itself or the author of the book. Any move about the subject of the book or the author was considered as a rhetorically distinct move.

Based on the variety of blurbs mentioned earlier, three main categories of blurbs were identified. 1. Electronic blurbs (i.e., those blurbs that are only available on the net), 2. non-electronic blurbs (i.e., those blurbs that are just seen on the back cover of books), and 3. electronic and non-electronic blurbs (i.e., the exact copy of the blurbs on the back cover of the books which is also available on the net). For this study, only those blurbs which were printed on the back cover of physics books were selected.

3.2. Analysis

All the three categories of the appraisal framework were explored with the purpose of identifying how these evaluatively lexicogrammatical resources were encoded in the sample of physics blurbs. First, the rhetorical patterns of the blurbs were identified. Next, the kinds of attitudinal and graduation resources as well as their grammatical patterns were explored and presented. Finally, tokens of the interpersonal metafunction (i.e., attitudinal resources) were explored in relation to the other two metafunctions (i.e., textual and ideational). Following Hood (2010), the coding conventions employed in the analysis of blurbs entail boldface to indicate explicit attitude and italics to indicate graduation.

In order to check accuracy, inter-coder procedure was utilized. The categories of attitude and graduation were coded nominally in order to compare the independent results of researchers. The categories were coded in terms of numbers having no numerical values and abbreviations (af1 for Affect, ju2 for Judgment, ap3 for Appreciation, Int4 for Intensification, and qua5 for Quantification).

In order to mitigate analytical subjectivity, 25% of the data (i.e., 8 physics blurbs) was analyzed independently by one of the researchers and another expert familiar with the appraisal framework. Then, the expert's analyses were compared with the researcher's textual analysis. Minor differences (e.g., regarding and disregarding the *main features* listed vertically as instances of graduation; regarding and disregarding the academic career of the author of the book as implicit judgment) were discussed and negotiated, and then an agreement was reached on the method of analysis.

Meanwhile, the examples were also coded using brackets consisting of two numbers separated from each other by a slash. The analysis of three blurbs is presented in the following sections, i.e., 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, each representing the first, second, and third blurbs, respectively. When, for instance, we see an example coded as [4/15], the left number shows that the example belongs to the first blurb, and the right number indicates the ordinal presentation of the example among the 30 blurbs.

4. Findings

4.1. Findings from the First Blurb

In what follows, the rhetorical patterns, kinds of attitude and graduation, textual, interpersonal, and ideational meanings of the following blurb are presented:

A concise but self-contained introduction of the central concepts of modern topology and differential geometry on a mathematical level is given specifically with applications in physics in mind. All basic concepts are systematically provided including sketches of the proofs of most statements. Smooth finite-dimensional manifolds, tensor and exterior calculus operating on them, homotopy, (co)homology theory including Morse theory of critical points, as well as the theory of fiber bundles and Riemannian geometry, are treated. Examples from physics comprise topological charges, the topology of periodic boundary conditions for solids, gauge fields, geometric phases in quantum physics and gravitation. (Topology and Geometry for Physics, by Helmut Eshrig. 2011. Springer).

4.1.1. Rhetorical Analysis

The above blurb contains one move in its discursive formation, called “*appraising the book by the blurb writer*”. Circulating around the value and content of the book, this move is expressed by the internal voice, that is, the blurb writer. Here, the blurb writer expresses his positive attitude toward the book, aiming to convince readers to buy it.

4.1.2. Attitudinal and Graduation Resources

The above blurb consists of the following inscribed positive attitudinal resources as appreciation in its rhetorical construction:

A **concise** but **self-contained** introduction [4/1]

the **central** concepts of modern topology [4/2]

All **basic** concepts [4/3]

Instances of graduation as force in terms of quantification are seen in the above blurb:

All [graduation: quantification] basic concepts [4/4]

most [graduation: quantification] statements [4/5]

Hood (2010) states that “Whereas pre-modification of an attitudinal quality intensifies that quality, the pre-modification of a nominalized quality functions to quantify rather than to intensify” (p. 86). Therefore, the word “most” quantifies the word “statements”.

4.1.3. Grammatical Forms for Attitudinal and Graduation Resources

In the above blurb, adjective is encoded grammatically as epithet for expressing the attitude of the blurb writer about the book:

A **concise** but **self-contained** introduction [4/6]

Meanwhile, processes such as *is given*, *are provided*, and *are treated* are also used as invoked appreciation that shows the worthiness of the book in dealing with the required topics necessary for readers:

Graduation as force is realized as pre-modification in terms of quantification (e.g., **All** basic concepts and **most** statements), as listing in terms of intensification (e.g., A **concise** but **self-contained** introduction), and as listing in terms of quantification (e.g., examples from physics comprise **topological charges, the topology of periodic boundary conditions for solids, gauge fields, geometric phases in quantum physics, and gravitation**).

4.1.4. Interpersonal Interpretation of Blurb’s Move(s) in terms of Ideational and Textual Orientations

Herein the above blurb, although the word “book” or the name of the book is not explicitly inserted, its implicit presence is realized in terms of interpreting the content of the move:

[4/7]

A concise but self-contained introduction of the central concepts of modern topology and differential geometry on a mathematical level

From a textual perspective, the initial prominence is given to the subject of the book. That is, examining the move from two perspectives (i.e., ideational and textual) has revealed that the subject of the book is the focal of attention across the text. From an interpersonal perspective, the language of evaluation is constructed via different strategies as inscribing attitude and grading experiential meanings with the purpose of adjusting readers' alignment towards having a positive stance for the book as well as aligning them to a community of shared beliefs about the significance and worthiness of the book.

4.2. Findings from the Second Blurb

In this section, the rhetorical specifications of the following blurb are presented:

Quantum mechanics is an important area of physics and students often find it 'tough' from the understanding point of view. By providing 500 problems with their solutions, Professor Aruldas, with his expertise in and long experience of teaching the subject, make the students comprehend the fundamental concepts of quantum Mechanics with ease.

This problem book provides a thorough understanding of the subject and its applications to various physical and chemical problems. The text includes typical problems that illustrate the concept. It is self-explanatory, comprehensive, and user-friendly.

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students of physics and chemistry as well as those preparing for the joint CSIR-UHC test for JRF and other competitive examinations should find this book extremely practical and valuable.

Key features

- Gives, in the beginning of each chapter, an outline of the theory required for solving problems.

- Includes problems from the simple plug-ins to increasing order of difficulty to strengthening the student's understanding of the subject
- Provides many mathematical steps to make the book user-friendly.
- Gives solutions of the problems with different types of potentials including the Dirac delta function potential.

G. Aruldas, PhD, was Professor and HEAD OF Physics Department, and Dean, Faculty of Science, University of Kerala, with over four decades of teaching experiences at the PG level. Dr Aruldas served as CSIR emeritus Scientist and Director, University Institute of Technology, Kerala University. He published about 145 research papers in various national and international journals. Dr Aruldas has authored other books which have been published by PHI Learning.

[Quantum Mechanics: 500 Problems with Solutions. G. Aruldas. 2011. PHI Learning]

4.2.1. Rhetorical Analysis

The above blurb comprises the following moves including *appraising the book by the blurb writer* and *about the author*. The move *appraising the book by the blurb writer* is divided into the following steps: *previewing the book*, *indicating the value of the book*, *targeting the market*, and *indicating the content of the book*.

4.2.2. Attitudinal and Graduation Resources

Multiple instances of inscribed attitude carrying positive meanings are used in the first move to construct an evaluative context. The piling up of multiple instances of positive attitudinal resources can rhetorically function to align readers with the writer's position on the usefulness of the book:

An **important** area of physics [5/8]

thorough understanding [5/9]

It is **self-explanatory, comprehensive, and user-friendly** [4/10]

extremely **practical and valuable** [5/11]

simple plug-ins [5/12]

steps to make the book **user-friendly** [5/13]

In addition to the application of explicit instances of attitudes as appreciation, the blurb writer makes use of invoked attitude via the employment of words such as “provide, give, and include”. These processes establish an implicit evaluative space by mentioning the positive outcomes and consequences that the book would have for the readers. Given the beneficial effects of the book presented and implied through the processes, these processes flag to the reader to evaluatively interpret the invoked meanings resided in them.

The language of evaluation is shifted from the predominance of positive inscribed attitude in the first move to the preponderance of invoked attitude in the second move. Two kinds of invoked attitude are observed in this move. First, the presence of the word “professor” in this move signals to the readers that the author of the book is competent in the subject matter. Accordingly, the readers would let their guard down when they know that the author has the required expertise in the field and, therefore, they would be more easily convinced to buy the book. So, the word “professor” implies attitude as the capacity which certainly has a positive impact on the readers’ decision to buy the book.

Meanwhile, invocation of attitude is realized via the employment of instances of graduation resources in the remainder of the second move. Here, the number of research papers that the author has published flags positive reading because it is positioned in the prosodic domain of positive attitudinal resources, showing that the author is prolific and active in the discourse community and can be academically trusted:

[5/14]

He published about **145** research papers in various national and international journals

4.2.3. Grammatical Forms for Attitudinal and Graduation Resources

Attitudinal qualities as epithet are used in the rhetorical formation of the above blurb:

an **important** area of physics [5/15]

thorough understanding [5/16]

simple plug-ins [5/17]

Attribute as a further grammatical resource for encoding attitudinal meaning is also employed as follows:

It is **self-explanatory, comprehensive, and user-friendly** [5/18]

As it was shown earlier, in addition to the rich range of attitudinal resources in the grammatical form of adjectives, processes are also pregnant with attitudinal meanings:

[5/19]

- **Gives**, in the beginning of each chapter, an outline of the theory required for solving problems.
- **Provides** many mathematical steps to make the book user-friendly.

Instances of nouns which are infused with attitudinal meaning are also seen in the above blurb:

[5/20]

Gives **solutions** of **problems** with different types of potentials including the Dirac delta function potential.

Although the word *problem* carries a negative meaning, its negative overtone is, however, counteracted by the positive effects that the book has. Here, the blurb writer acknowledges that the students of physics would come up with academic problems which might be discouraging for them. Therefore, he introduces the book as a suitable remedy for the problems.

4.2.4. *Interpersonal Interpretation of Blurb's Move(s) in terms of Ideational and Textual Orientations*

The ideational entity in the first move is the subject of “quantum mechanics” which is concurrently selected as the name of the book.

[5/21]

Quantum mechanics is an important area of physics and students often find it ‘tough’ from the understanding point of view. By providing 500 problems with their solutions...

From a textual perspective, the initial prominence is given to the subject of the book. Here, the textual prominence in the theme of the move corresponds to the foregrounded positioning of the ideational meaning of the move. In this move, interpersonal meaning is mainly constructed in terms of multiple instances of inscribed attitudinal resources in order to overtly align readers towards the significance and worthiness of the book which is thematically positioned as the field of the discourse for the first move.

The field of discourse in the second move is shifted from the subject of the book in the first move to the subject of the author in the second move:

[5/22]

G. Aruldhas, PhD, was Professor and HEAD OF Physics Department, and Dean, Faculty of Science, University of Kerala, with over four decades of teaching experiences

Here, the ideational meaning (i.e., the subject of the author) is given the initial thematic prominence in the discourse of the second move. Contrary to the first move constructing an evaluative stance mainly in terms of the maximal employment of inscriptions of attitudinal resources, the second move is evaluatively constructed as invoking attitude and grading experiential meanings.

4.3. Findings from the Third Blurb

Consider the third blurb for the purpose of this study:

“... a delightful book which uses space time diagrams to teach the basic features of special relativity. The abundant illustrations form a great complement to the equation that appear in many texts. The author’s cartoons are charming, and hold the readers’ attention- indeed, the material can in principle be learned directly from figures and annotations without referring to the main text at all.” Don Marolf, University of California, Santa Barbara

Aimed at both physics students and non-science majors, this unique book explains Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity pictorially, using diagrams rather than equations. The diagrams guide the reader, step-by-step, from the basics of relativity to advanced topics including the addition of velocities, Lorentz contraction, time dilation, twin paradox, Doppler shift, and Einstein’s famous equation $E=MC$. The distinctive figures throughout the book enable the reader to visualize the theory in a way that cannot be fully conveyed through equation alone.

The illustrative explanations in this book maintain the logic and rigor necessary for physics students yet are simple enough to be understood by non-scientists. The book also contains entertaining problems, which challenge the reader’s understanding of the materials covered.

Tatsu Takeuchi is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physics at Virginia Tech. This book grew from the “Highlights of the Contemporary Physics” course he taught for many years. Primarily aimed at non-Physics Majors, it has been highly popular among physics students as well. [An Illustrated Guide to Relativity: Tatsu Takeuchi, 2010. Cambridge University Press.

4.3.1. *Rhetorical Analysis*

The above blurb entails three major moves in its discursal formation including *appraising the book by the external voice*, *appraising the*

book by the blurb writer, and about the author. The second major move (i.e., *appraising the book by the blurb writer*) is also divided into the following categories: *targeting the market* and *indicating the content and value of the book*.

4.3.2. Attitudinal and Graduation Resources

The first move carries a special rhetorical function. The presence of the first move in the blurb shows that the blurb writer presents himself as accepting the reliability, validity, and accuracy of the value positions about the book referenced by an external voice, thereby aligning himself with the external voice advancing such claims. That is to say, the blurb writer indicates a strong investment in the value positions referenced by the external voice. The propositions, claims, or value positions influenced by the rhetorical functionality of the move, in terms of the agreement between the external and internal voices, act to align the readers towards accepting the reliability of those claims. Meanwhile, it sets against other likely contrary positions. Therefore, value positions in the move might more likely be interpreted as valid and reliable on the part of readers due to the existence of such a rhetorical move.

Instances of inscribed attitude are evident in the construal of the first move. The explicit application of attitudinal resources in the first move has located the move on the persuasive side of advertising discourse:

a **delightful** book [6/23]

The author's cartoons are **charming** [6/24]

The second move is also charged with instances of attitudinal resources for maintaining the language of evaluation:

this **unique** book [6/25]

The **illustrative** explanations [6/26]

simple enough [6/27]

entertaining problems [6/28]

The **distinctive** figures [6/29]

In the third move, although one instance of explicit attitude is evident, the language of

evaluation is mainly carried out through the application of invoked judgment by mentioning the academic degree of the author of the book, reflecting that the author is competent in his field of study:

[6/30]

Tatsu Takeuchi is **an Associate Professor** in the Department of Physics at Virginia Tech.

Here, the academic degree of the author is intentionally used to assure readers that he has sufficient knowledge in the field of study under discussion. Therefore, mentioning the academic degree of the author invokes the meaning that the author is competent in his field of study.

Instances of both kinds of graduation resources (i.e., quantification and intensification) are seen in the rhetorical moves of the blurb subjectifying the objective meanings and signaling to readers to read the informative meanings evaluatively:

The **abundant** [graduation: quantification: mass] illustrations [6/31]

many [graduation: quantification: number] texts [6/32]

highly [graduation: intensification] popular [6/33]

4.3.3. Grammatical Forms for Attitudinal and Graduation Resources

Instances of adjective as the salient grammatical tool of encoding attitude are evident as epithet in this blurb:

a **delightful** book [6/34]

basic features of special relativity [6/35]

The **illustrative** explanations [6/36]

entertaining problems [6/37]

Attitudinal meaning is also encoded as attribute in the above blurb:

The author's cartoons are **charming** [6/38]

In this blurb, the noun *problem* also carries attitudinal meaning, showing that evaluation is

present even in the absence of the congruent form for expressing attitude:

The book also contains entertaining **problems** [6/39]

Processes are also seen to contain attitudinal meaning for sustaining positive values across the text where adjectives are not likely to be used:

[6/40]

The diagrams **guide** the reader, step-by-step, from the basics of relativity to advanced topics

[6/41]

The distinctive figures throughout the book **enable** the reader to visualize the theory in a way that cannot be fully conveyed through equation alone.

Graduation is also realized as pre-modification in terms of intensification (e.g., cannot be **fully** conveyed; it has been **highly** popular among physics students as well), or as pre-modification in terms of quantification (e.g., **many** texts)

4.3.4. *Interpersonal Interpretation of Blurb's Move(s) in terms of Ideational and Textual Orientations*

In the first move of the blurb, the ideational meaning is the concept of the book, that is, what the move is written for to give information to readers about the subject of the study:

[6/42]

a delightful book which uses space time diagrams to teach the basic features of special relativity. The abundant illustrations form...

From a textual perspective, the initial thematic prominence also corresponds to the field of discourse as the ideational meaning of the move. That is, the topical prominence is thematically represented as the subject of the study (i.e., the book). From an interpersonal perspective, the move is charged with attitudinal resources for constructing the evaluative weight in order to persuasively and

convincingly align the readers towards the ideational meaning which is given topical prominence.

The ideational entity of the second move is also the concept of the book, that is, what the move is wholly written for:

[6/43]

Aimed at both physics students and non-science majors, this unique book explains Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity pictorially, using diagrams...

Similarly, the subject of the book as the ideational meaning of the second move is also given initial prominence. The second move is also evaluatively loaded with inscriptions of attitudinal resources for pushing readers towards acknowledging the importance and worthiness of the ideational entity (i.e., the book) which is ideationally positioned in the thematically initial prominence of the move.

In the third move, the field of discourse shifts from the ideational meaning of the book to the author of the book:

[6/44]

Tatsu Takeuchi is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physics at Virginia Tech. This book grew from the "Highlights of the Contemporary Physics" course he taught...

Here, the thematically initial prominence is given to the author of the book establishing the field of the discourse in the third move. Evaluative stance is mainly constructed in terms of the invocation of attitude and grading experiential meanings, flagging an attitudinal interpretation.

5. Discussion

In this section, to answer the research questions the rhetorical patterns, kinds of attitude, and graduation, textual, interpersonal, and ideational meanings of the above findings are discussed.

The concept of maximal and minimal rhetorical realization refers to the presence of moves in a blurb (Question one). When a blurb is in its minimal rhetorical realization, the least

possible number of moves is employed in the construction of the blurb. On the other hand, when a blurb is in its maximal rhetorical realization, the most possible number of moves is used in the blurb.

We suggest that maximal rhetorical realizations of a physics blurb might increase the chance of reading a physics book by the prospective readers, and vice versa. The reason is that more persuasive and informative features will be provided for the readers, making them possibly more interested in the physics book.

In the maximal rhetorical realization of the physics blurbs in this study, three rhetorical moves were identified including *appraising the book by the external voice*, *describing the book by the blurb writer*, and *about the author*.

The first move (i.e., *appraising the book by the external voice*) is dense with inscribed attitudinal resources and is rhetorically sourced to an external voice. The move is presented as indicating an external voice complementing the book in terms of employing explicit attitudinal resources. The second move (i.e., *describing the book by the blurb writer*) is charged with explicit attitudinal resources. The move is referenced to the internal source (i.e., the blurb writer) about the quality and the content of the book. The third move, attributed to the internal source, is evaluatively encoded by means of graduation resources and invoked judgment.

In the first and second moves, evaluation is achieved directly representing the persuasive function of the blurb, and in the third move, it is achieved indirectly representing the informative function of the blurb. That is, in the first and second moves, evaluative stance is constructed via the maximal reliance on explicit inscribed attitude, whereas in the third move, attitudinal reading is invoked through graduation resources and implicit judgment signaling to the prospective readers to interpret the informative move evaluatively. In other words, in the third move, evaluative stance is constructed in the absence of explicit attitudinal resources.

To answer the second research question of the study, based on the analysis of the blurbs, it was found that physics blurbs entail the

informative and persuasive functions. Both of these two functions are rhetorically evaluative; that is, the persuasive move is overtly coded in terms of inscriptions of attitude, whereas the informative move is covertly coded in terms of graduation resources and invoked judgment. Therefore, the blurbs are represented as being persuasively and informatively evaluative. The informative and persuasive evaluations constitute a cline at two ends of which information and persuasion are located. This cline of evaluation enables us to interpret the statements as: 1. the ones which are more persuasive because of the presence of attitudinal resources; 2. the ones which are more informative because of the application of graduation resources and invoked judgment.

The persuasive function, foregrounded in the sample blurbs, represents the marketing aspect of blurbs, and the informative function represents the academic aspect of blurbs. The first ideational entity (i.e., the book), which is thematically prominent in the beginning phase of blurbs' discourse, achieves persuasive function in terms of the employment of inscribed attitudinal resources. The second ideational meaning (i.e., the author), which is thematically prominent in the final phase of blurbs' discourse, achieves informative function with reference to the application of graduation resources and invoked judgment.

The concept of the cline of evaluation establishes grounds for objectivity and subjectivity. The more subjective component of a blurb is seen as having more attitudinal resources expressing the personal beliefs and attitudes of external and internal voices in favor of the book. The more subjective side of the blurb represents more qualities and features of advertising and is more market-oriented. On the other hand, the more objective side is seen to entail academic backgrounds and experiences of the author of the book. Thus, the blurb writers attempt to maintain the academic status of blurbs via situating an objective component in them, while, at the same time, they directly achieve advertising by means of a subjective component.

Regarding the third research question, the rhetorical presentation of blurbs has shown that they initially focus on the book qualities

and content, and the issues related to the author are postponed to the end of the blurb indicating that more important and prominent subjects of discussion come to the fore and receive primary attention. This way of presenting information is similar to the grammatical structure of the passive voice. In the passive voice, the doer of the action is replaced by the recipient of the action emphasizing the role and function of the object. Likewise, the object of the book has the primary and foremost significance in blurbing because the attempt is to convince readers to buy the book by magnifying and highlighting the importance of the book.

When the subject and the theme of a clause are the same, we have an unmarked theme; when the theme is other than the subject of the clause, we refer to it as a marked theme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). With reference to this definition, the organization of a blurb, beginning with the book and followed by the author who has produced the book, adopts a thematically marked configuration which is at the service of more information communicated to the addressees.

Regarding the fourth question of the study, the concept of textual patterning of meanings refers to the prominence of certain meanings over other ones in an unfolding discourse which in English is associated with the initialization and finalization of the discourse (Hood, 2010). The following two concepts, i.e., hyper-Theme and hyper-New, are used to explain the mechanism of how meanings textually act in a discourse. Hyper-Theme refers to a high-level macro theme functioning as the predictor of the meanings in a long stretch of discourse, such as the introduction in a research article, and a high-level macro New, such as the conclusion in a research article, is concerned with consolidating and reinforcing meaning in the preceding components and sections of the discourse (Hood, 2010). Hyper-Theme is concerned with the prospective prosody which flows from high-level macro theme, and hyper New focuses on the retrospective prosody which flows from a high-level macro New (Hood, 2010).

Here, the purpose is to show how interpersonal prosody of meanings in blurbs can be explained in terms of textual patterning. In the

maximal rhetorical realization of blurbs, the first and second moves (i.e., *appraising the book by an external voice* and *describing the book by the blurb writer*) are represented as the persuasive ones because of employing a panoply of evaluatively inscribed attitudinal resources in their rhetorical formation. On the other hand, the third move (i.e., *about the author*) is considered as the informative part of blurbs because of the non-existence of inscribed attitudinal resources, although evaluation is achieved in terms of graduation resources and invoked judgment. In this regard, among the three analyzed blurbs of physics, the one which represents the maximal rhetorical realization (i.e., the third analyzed blurb in this study) shows how interpersonal meanings are rhetorically dispersed across the moves from the perspective of the textual metafunction.

The strong prosody of positive inscribed attitudinal and graduation resources which is built in the first move is projected to the next move. In other words, the interpersonal meaning from the high-level macro theme of the first move flows prospectively to the adjacent move which is also rhetorically regarded as a persuasive move. The first persuasive move is externally endorsed, while the second persuasive move is internally endorsed.

The prospective flowing of interpersonally prosodic meaning which was built in the high-level macro Theme move and was reinforced in the second move by dint of attitudinal resources proceeds to the third move because of the logogenetic progression of interpersonal prosody due to the chain of attitudinal harmonies existing between the various moves in a blurb. In the third move, interpersonal prosody is implied mainly through resources of graduation and invoked judgment.

The third move is the high-level macro New section of the blurb. The first interpersonal wave of prosodic meaning which projects forwards from hyper-Theme source and reaches its final destination in the third move then rebounds retrospectively from the high-level macro New. The second wave of interpersonal meaning is stronger than the first one because of the impact of the first interpersonal wave which progresses

logogenetically across the blurb. The return of the interpersonal meaning from hyper-New can reinforce the previously established interpersonal meaning. Therefore, the prospective flowing of interpersonal meaning in terms of hyper-Theme with the centrality of the issue of “book” and the retrospective flowing of interpersonal meaning in terms of hyper-New with the centrality of the “author” can contribute to the stronger formation of the persuasive nature of the blurb:

“... **a delightful book** which uses space time diagrams to teach the basic features of special relativity. The **abundant** illustrations form a **great** complement to the equation that appear



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The main source of the first interpersonal wave is the high-level macro Theme which is rhetorically persuasive, whereas the source of the second interpersonal wave is the high-level macro New. The intensity of the Hyper-Theme is very important for triggering the return of the second wave of interpersonal meaning from high-level macro New, so the blurb is rhetorically initiated with a persuasive move which is promotionally stronger and more convincing than the informative one. However, when the third move, represented as high-level macro New, receives the persuasive nature of the first and second moves because of the logogenetic progression of interpersonal meanings across the blurb, it capitalizes on the created interpersonal meaning for triggering a stronger backward movement from the informative side of the blurb to its persuasive side, representing the second wave. Thus, when a reader is persuasively propelled along the blurb, s/he would be disposed to read and attend to the less persuasive move of a blurb. Therefore, the blurbs usually open with a

strong pulse of positive attitudinal resources for ensuring a reliably strong start.

Blurbs, as an advertising discourse, make use of evaluative resources including attitudinal and graduation resources for constructing an evaluative stance with the purpose of aligning the readers toward blurb writers’ positioning about the book, leading to the construction of the persuasive and informative functions.

The qualitative analysis showed that the persuasive function of blurbs which is realized through the maximal reliance on attitudinal resources is textually positioned in the beginning phase of the blurbs’ discourse, and the informative function of blurbs lacking inscribed resources are situated at the end of the blurbs’ structure. That is, a dense accumulation of inscribed attitudinal resources were observed in the beginning phase of physics blurbs representing the persuasive function of blurbs. On the other hand, invocations of attitudes on account of the application of graduation resources and invoked judgment were found at the end of the blurbs constituting the informative function of blurbs.

In the maximal rhetorical realization of the above analyzed blurbs, two ideational meanings are found to be thematically prominent from the perspective of textual meaning including “the book” and “the author”. However, the analyzed blurb entails three moves. Therefore, we have three rhetorical moves but two ideational entities. As such, one of the ideational meanings in the above blurb has to be mentioned in two moves. That is, there are two major shifts in the ideational meaning as the field focus of the discourse from the perspective of textual meaning constituting three rhetorical moves. Rhetorical moves are pragmatically identified with reference to the rhetorical functions they perform for achieving their communicative purposes. Accordingly, there might be one ideational entity which is thematically prominent as the field focus of the discourse but can be used for constituting several rhetorical moves with regard to the specific communicative purposes (i.e., ideational entity) it has to achieve.

Meanwhile, the theme of book as one of the ideational entities of the analyzed blurbs is

used in the persuasive component and the theme of author as the other ideational entity is used in the informative component. The presence of the book as the ideational entity in the beginning and the author at the end of the blurb leads to the grammatically passive formation of blurbs' discourse indicating that the subject of the book is given primacy.

Overall, applying a considerable amount of inscribed attitudinal resources in the beginning phase of blurbs containing the ideational entity of "book" in their initial thematic positioning indicates that the purpose of physics blurbs is primarily to convince readers to buy the books.

The findings of this study merely incorporate the analysis of blurbs in physics. This might have the effect of confining our findings to merely one discipline. More broadly, further research is needed to examine the evaluative and rhetorical structures for the blurbs of other disciplines. Meanwhile, our analysis is restricted to the analysis of blurbs in English. Future research should therefore analyze the blurbs of other languages for finding out how they are constructed evaluatively and rhetorically in languages other than English.

The findings of the study are attributed directly to discourse analysts who tend to gain knowledge and understanding about how qualitatively evaluative resources are rhetorically progressed across the texts of the blurbs in general and physics blurbs in particular. Meanwhile, discourse analysts might also be able to make use of the methodological procedures of this study to investigate the employment of evaluative language in both hard and soft sciences.

Moreover, the findings of the study might also be of help for the novice blurb writers of hard sciences in particular by informing them about the attitudinal resources which are predominantly used and favored in blurbs, thus encouraging them to explore the evaluative language in other disciplines and making comparative studies. Meanwhile, they would also be informed about the grammatical encoding of linguistic resources as well as the logogenetic progression of rhetorical resources in the generic formation of blurbs.

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