

## Persuasive Faculty and Rhetorical Structure Analysis of Popular Filipino Fiction Book Blurbs from 1980 – Present

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### Abstract

Blurbs, being a subtle yet powerful pitch that influence readers to pick-up a book, might contradict the old adage ‘*You cannot judge a book by its cover*’. People do get influenced by blurbs (Schaefer & Nelson, 2012). And they provide a vista of writing styles, a rhetoric that not only appeals to readers’ senses, but also resonates the cultural or socio-political ideals of a population at a given decade, which Küçüksakarya (2015) calls “contextually motivated language choices”. A local study, for instance, has forwarded that in the Philippines, culture greatly influences the way of writing (Pariña, 2010), and is a potent factor for persuading people to read. The style of blurb writing for Filipino fiction books, however, still remains unexplored, which is why this study is conducted. Anchored on Gea-Valor’s (2005) textual strategies to analyze twenty (20) blurbs of fiction books gathered from Goodreads – five each from decades 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 to present, findings showed that Filipino fiction book blurbs are more informational, than promotional. Albeit present in all decades, the blurbs in the following decades also focus on culture and romance. Utilizing Maan and Thompson’s (1986) Rhetorical Structure Theory, the analyses reveal that most blurbs entrench the plot to the potential readers, weaving both the informative and promotional intent of the blurbs. Filipino blurb writers more commonly use *positive evaluative adjectives, superlatives, intensifiers, elliptical structure, personal pronouns like ‘we’, ‘us’, and ‘ours’ including rhetorical questions and imperatives directed towards readers*, which help establish the Filipino’s communal culture, or the interconnectedness of ‘*pakikisama*’, which Pariña (2010) noted as one of the features of Filipino writing. The researchers recommend looking into the rhetorical structure and other presentational schemes of blurbs used as virtual advertising to shed light on this growing inquisitiveness towards this genre.

**Keywords:** *blurbs, Filipino fiction, academic genre, Philippine literature, rhetorical structure*

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## Introduction

A book's blurb is its own pitch. Each varies strategies but all share a common goal of appealing to their audience. Most start with providing a gist and end with a call for action, that is to read inside or even to simply make the purchase. Grossi (2015) described a blurb as both informative and persuasive. It presents information about a book and its author, and with the intention of attracting potential readers. The number of books swarming in through physical and online bookstores creates added pressure and the market is ever more competitive. With wanting to get a gist of every book, blurbs are of significant help.

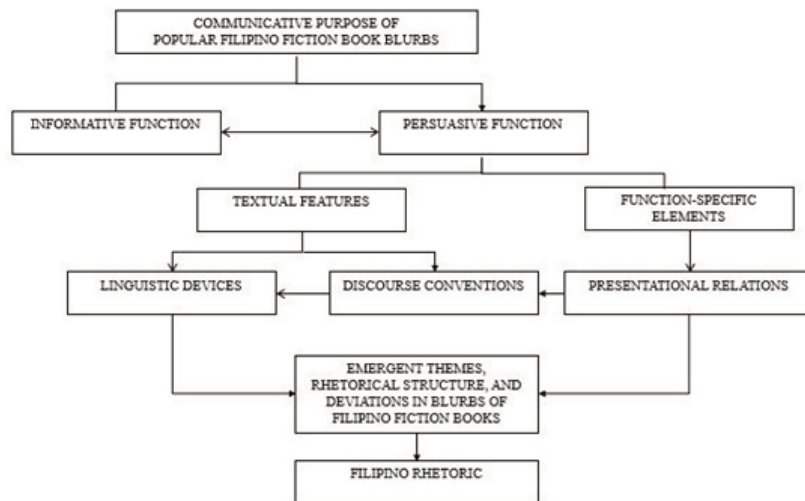
Over the last decades, researchers' interest in blurbs has grown exponentially and led to various analyses like generic (Bhatia, 1997, 2004; Al-Shekly and Moshin, 2013; Asgar, 2015; and Godis, 2017), linguistic (Grossi, 2015; Smoliana, 2013; Küçüksakarya, 2015; Muhammad, 2015; and Cacchiani, 2007), and diachronic (Marčiulionienė, 2006; and Gea-Valor and Ros, 2009). Corpora are often those blurbs gathered from widely known publishing houses and are mostly in English; however, on the particular area of Filipino book blurbs, there appears to be no existing studies and research, which therefore motivated the conduct of this study.

This study, hence, aims to explore Filipino book blurbs and to discuss both what and how schemes are presented and what purpose these serve. Collective realization of the persuasive facet would shed light on effective blurb writing. It also seeks to explore the historical context of blurb composition and the Filipino writing style it reflects. This paper, specifically, addresses the following questions:

1. What textual features help achieve the persuasive function of book blurbs in terms of:
  - 1.1. Linguistic Devices; and,
  - 1.2. Discourse Conventions?
2. What are the emergent themes, rhetorical structure, and deviations prevalent in popular Filipino fiction book blurbs from 1980 – present?
3. What does the development of book blurb writing from 1980 – present tell us about Filipino's rhetoric in writing?

The corpora of this study are blurbs from twenty (20) fiction books gathered from Goodreads' popular Filipino fiction books list – five each from decades 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 to date. The researchers decided to limit the corpora to fiction book blurbs, following Maguire's (2018) assertion on the subject, that literary fiction is too vast to grasp. Moreover, with a landscape comprised of idiosyncratic and potentially interesting works, blurbs have become one of the pivotal bases for fiction book purchases. This implies that the writing process of fiction book blurbs is challenging and competitive, and hence prompting compelling strategies.

To identify the textual features, mainly linguistic devices and discourse conventions, in the book blurbs, the researchers utilized Gea-Valor's (2005) presentation strategies. To describe the rhetorical structure, the researchers employed Maan and Thompson's (1986) presentational relations. The researchers also distinguished emergent themes, patterns, and deviations prevalent in popular Filipino fiction book blurbs from 1980 – present, which helped identify a specific pattern of rhetoric among Filipino blurb writers.



It is established that book blurbs fulfill a promotional purpose (Kathpalia, 1997; Bhatia, 2004; Gea-Valor, 2005; Gea-Valor & Ros, 2009; Önder, 2011). Trachtenberg (2003) asserts that in the battle of capturing attention, these short texts can make a difference. According to Kleiman (2002), blurbs have the social function of seducing the reader into further reading by making use of linguistic devices and employing various discourse conventions – the same which Küçüksakarya (2015) refers to as motivated language choices. All of which are leaning towards persuasion and rhetoric.

The interplay between language and culture is manifested in rhetorical patterns and tendencies (Tarrayo, 2011), hence studying the rhetoric of popular Filipino fiction book blurbs does not only identify the effective promotional facet of blurb composition and how Filipino blurb writers satisfy the communicative purpose of the genre, but it also helps manifest the persuasive writing style of Filipinos and the culture it emulates.

## Review of Related Literature

The definitions from different dictionaries focus on the brevity of blurbs and its persuasive purpose:

“a short description of a book, a new product, etc., written by the people who have produced it, that is intended to attract your attention and make you want to buy it” – Oxford Learner’s Dictionary

“a short description to advertise a product” – Cambridge Dictionary

“a short publicity notice; to describe or praise” – Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Despite the non-placet it has received and the negative connotations attached to its concept and process, book blurbs still hold their place and relevance in the publishing and marketing industry. People do get influence by blurbs (Schaefer & Nelson, 2012) and a good one can variably change the fortune of the book (Qasim & Shakir, 2016).

Recent studies exploring the influence of blurbs on consumer selection and purchase and books’ point of sale revealed that avid readers are influenced by book blurbs in purchasing a book, placing third on the list after author representation, and personal recommendation (Verso Advertising, 2010) and blurbs affect buying trends along with interest in series, pricing, and reading and extract (Neilson Books and Consumers, 2014).

As asserted by Trachtenberg (2003), in the battle of capturing attention, blurbs can make a difference. According to Kleiman (2002), book blurbs have the social function of seducing the reader into further reading by making use of linguistic devices and employing various discourse conventions. Kūçüksakarya (2015) calls these “contextually motivated language choices”. With an established promotional purpose, blurbs employ a wide range of linguistic features and strategies directed towards persuasion, hence establishing its relation to rhetoric.

Kennedy (1994) asserts, when we express emotions and thought to other people to influence or persuade them, we are engaging ourselves in rhetoric. In this paper, rhetoric is defined as the study of effective writing and speaking and the act of persuasion (Burton, 2016) and as the study and practice of communication that informs and persuades target audiences to change or reinforce beliefs and actions (Goodman, 2016).

Kaplan (1966) asserted different cultures have different rhetorical tendencies. Pariña (2010) construed that in the Philippines, culture greatly influences the way of writing and correspondences may exhibit rhetorical differences. One example is the great emphasis Filipinos place on interconnectedness and social networks and the virtue of *pakikisama* that

is reflected in their composition. Pariña added that Filipino writing is vivacious and contains contextual features that are taken as wordy, but distinct and understandable. This further accentuates Cruz and Bernardo's (n.d.) findings that the persuasive strategies Filipinos employ are a combination of logical and emotional appeals.

Over the last decades, researchers' interest in blurbs has grown exponentially. Studies on book blurbs' genre and communicative purposes, linguistic features, and rhetoric structures have already been conducted and are very enriching. Notedly, the discipline of Filipino book blurbs is largely unexplored.

### **Research Methodology**

This paper utilizes the elements of descriptive-qualitative research from looking at textual features and function-specific elements, describing a rhetorical move structure, to culling prevalent and emergent linguistic and strategic characteristics. Throughout the immersion in detail, the variables were not in any way manipulated and a position of neutrality was maintained.

The corpora of this study are blurbs from twenty fiction books gathered from Goodreads' popular Filipino fiction books list – five each from decades 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 to date to demonstrate a substantial historical context of blurb composition. The articles of Macansantos & Macansantos (n.d.) and Sarvia (1997) posited that, albeit already flourishing, it was starting in the 1980s when Philippine fiction has become even more social-realist, meaning the decade marked the Filipinos' even stronger search for identity and their quest for integrity in a politically and morally corrupt society as reflected as well in fiction. It would be interesting, on the part of the researchers, to know how the blurbs were constructed throughout these decades to draw readership and inspiration at a time when there is constant struggle for genuine liberation from oppression, abuse, and corruption.

Goodreads as a social-cataloging website is currently the world's largest site for book recommendations with a massive reach of more than 80 million book lovers, making it a conclusive platform to promote books. Ratings and reviews provided by readers in the platform are telling information on the text material being evaluated. Since Goodreads is, by far, the most comprehensive to date, makes it an ideal source for the corpora for analysis.

The timeline criteria are set to achieve one of the objectives of the study, that is to distinguish emergent themes, patterns, and deviations. Books are selected according to their publication dates, which the researchers limited to the range of 1980s-present only – four decades to present shifts and developments in blurb composition. The timeframe is one of the limitations of the study. The Goodreads' popular Filipino fiction book list is an entire section and includes a total of 68 books from where the corpora are gathered following the provided

criteria. Outside the given, the selection is random (e.g., which among the more than five books published in the 1980s are selected).

For the 1980s, the blurbs in the following books have been included:

- Bata, bata... Pa'no Ka Ginawa? – Lualhati Bautista (1983)
- Cave and Shadows – Nick Joaquin (1983)
- Dusk (Rosales Saga. #1) – F. Sionil José (1984)
- Dekada '70 (Ang Original at Kumpletong Edisyon) – Lualhati Bautista (1984)
- 'GAPÔ (at isang putting Pilipino, sa mundo ng mga Amerikanong kulay brown) – Lualhati Bautista (1988)

For the 1990s, the blurbs in the following books have been included:

- The Woman Who Had Two Navels – Nick Joaquin (1991)
- Killing Time in a Warm Place – José Y. Dalisay Jr. (1992)
- Sarcophagus and Other Stories – José Y. Dalisay (1992)
- Be My Love, Katherine – Martha Cecilia (1997)
- Kapitan Sino – Bob Ong (1999)

For the 2000s, the blurbs in the following books have been included:

- The Samsons: The Pretenders and Mass (Rosales Saga, #4-5) – F. Sionil José (2000)
- Stainless Longganisa – Bob Ong (2005)
- Salamanca – Dean Francis Alfar (2007)
- Para Kay B (o kung paano denevastate ng pag-ibig ang 4 out of 5 sa atin) – Ricky Lee (2008)
- Ilustrado – Miguel Syjuco (2008)

For the years 2010-present, the blurbs in the following books have been included:

- Alternative Alamat: Stories Inspired by Philippine Mythology – Paolo Chikiamco (2011)
- Diary ng Panget – HaveYouSeenThisGirl (2013)
- Kristine Series 18: Rose Tattoo 1 – Martha Cecilia (2014)
- A Wife's Cry Part One – Barbs Galicia (2014)
- My Husband is a Mafia Boss – Yanajin (2014)

Out of the twenty blurbs, eleven are written in full English, five in full Filipino, and four have code-switched between English and Filipino. However, this will not affect the analyses despite having differing language systems and nonetheless discerned following the same framework.

Gea-Valor's (2005) presentation strategies guided the researchers in identifying the textual features, in particular, the linguistic devices and discourse conventions. The same is cited in recent genre-based studies and linguistic analyses on book blurbs (Gea-Valor and Ros, 2009; Grossi and Bruti, 2015; Muhammad, 2015). It is noted this is not the only list developed and used in the process of realizing the promotional nature of book blurbs, and the researchers acknowledge that other features not included in the mentioned model could also be present in the corpora.

*Complimenting*, which include intensifying adverbs, employing positive evaluative adjectives, using superlative constructions; (on the book) underlining the effect of the book to the reader and the awards won by the book as a guarantee of its quality; (on the author) highlighting the author's writing qualities and style and his/her reputation or success as a guarantee for the book, praising the author

*Ellipsis*, which include employing minor sentences or sentences without a verb, omitting the subject to have an impact and to establish proximity with the reader

*Imperative*, which include mitigating illocutionary force to make recommendations of the book more personal and the appeal to the reader more direct and one-to-one, using politeness strategies

*Address form "you"*, which generalize the readers' feelings, emotions, and reactions to the book, to address the readers to something more personal

*Curiosity arousers*, which include displaying excerpts from the book, posing of rhetorical questions containing key elements to the plot

Unlike Gea-Valor's presentation strategies, the linguistic devices and discourse conventions in this paper are presented separately. Though both are leaning towards persuasion, these have different persuasive abilities. Linguistic devices attract attention through words, sounds, and other embellishments, while discourse conventions are established language practices and expressions.

To describe a rhetorical structure, the researchers employed Maan and Thompson's (1986) Rhetorical Structure Theory. To achieve this, presentational relations must be first discerned as these are what compose the structure.

*Antithesis* – increases positive regard; displaying an idea disfavored by the author to supplementarily pose an idea favored by the author

*Background* – increases ability; displaying a text facilitating reader's

understanding

*Concession* – increases positive regard; displaying an idea affirmed by the author

*Enablement* – increases ability; displaying an aid needed for the reader to perform action

*Evidence* – increases belief; displaying information intended to increase the reader's belief

*Justification* – increases acceptance; displaying information supporting the author's claim

*Motivation* – increases desire; displaying information intended to increase the reader's desire to perform an action

The analyses of textual features and rhetoric moves were based on how it advertises the book and not on how it entrenches the plot of the story. The collated linguistic devices, discourse conventions, and presentational relations were then evaluated to identify the emergent themes, rhetorical patterns, and deviations prevalent in popular Filipino fiction book blurbs from 1980 – present.

## Results and Discussions

### Linguistic Devices and Discourse Conventions that Facilitate the Persuasive Function of Blurbs in Filipino Fiction Books

This paper aims to determine the linguistic devices and discourse conventions that help achieve the persuasive function of popular Filipino fiction book blurbs. Here, the researchers employed Gea-Valor's (2005) textual strategies. However, there are notable features that are outside the presented list which then prompted the researcher to provide a redefined list.

**Table 1:** Linguistic Devices and Discourse Conventions in Filipino Fiction Book Blurbs

Linguistic Devices	<i>Positive evaluative adjectives, Superlatives, Intensifiers, Elliptical structure, Personal pronouns</i>
Discourse Conventions	<i>Author's reputation, writing qualities and style, guarantee for the book, Effect of the book to the reader, Excerpts, Rhetorical question, Imperative, Expression of novelty, Expression of uniqueness, Genre-marker, Awards won by the book</i>



## Linguistic Devices

### *Positive Evaluative Adjectives*

Positive evaluative adjectives add a constructive meaning to the word it modifies. These are employed to praise the book and to attract the attention of the potential reader, making them want to read more inside and to eventually purchase the book. Examples of this linguistic feature such as how **must-read** and **meaningful** are used in these blurbs to capture the interest of readers:

*“...this literary whodunit is still considered a **must-read** by students of Philippine Literature.” (Cave and Shadows by Nick Joaquin)*

*“...a book as **meaningful** to Philippine literature as One Hundred Years of Solitude is to Latin American literature.” (Dusk by F. Sionil Jose)*

### *Superlatives*

Superlatives are adjectives that take the word it modifies to the highest degree of quality and are employed in comparing three or more things, like the word **strongest** in the excerpt that follows. The adjective is an example of a booster, which denounces something to be absolutely desirable as the book is of the highest quality.

*“But many of the author’s **strongest** stories – “The Other Side”, In the Garden”, “Merlie”, “The Body”, and “Under the Dinosaurs” – appear in this collection.” (Sarcophagus and Other Stories by Jose Y. Dalisay Jr.)*

Helpful and conclusive as it may seem, this linguistic feature is only found once in the corpora. Nevertheless, it would still be reflected in the list because of its effective persuasive facet.

### *Intensifiers*

Intensifiers are adverbs, for example, are the words **widely**, **wildly**, and **deeply**, as used in the sample lines from the blurbs; which modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. They strengthen meaning and show emphasis, expressing attitude to enhance and to give additional emotional context. Also, in discerning this feature, the classification of modifiers that serve the book and amplify the dramatic value of the work is applied.

*“It is **widely** considered as a classic in Philippine literature.” (The Woman Who Had Two Navels by Nick Joaquin)*

“Exuberant and wise, **wildly** funny and **deeply** moving, *Ilustrado* explores the hidden truths that haunt every family.” (*Ilustrado* by Miguel Syjuco)

### *Elliptical Structure*

Ellipsis is the omission of a part of a sentence and is a vastly spread phenomenon in natural language and everyday communication. It is a norm feature of the spoken language; however, when it is transferred into a written one, it is qualified as a stylistic device. Ellipsis is used not just to compress speech but also to imitate real speech in the attempt to sound more colloquial or as to how Carter et al (1997) define it, to create an illusion of closeness. The excerpts below show a nominal ellipsis that did not only shorten a statement but also created a space of common understanding between the *blurber* and the potential reader, and a question-answer ellipsis that emulates a verbal dialogue feature.

“Definitely a political novel.” (*Dekada '70* by Lualhati Bautista)

“Cliché? YES!” (*Diary ng Panget* by HaveYouSeenThisGirL)

### *Personal Pronouns*

In Gea-Valor’s list of strategies, she has only presented the use of address form *you*, bearing that it leads to involve the prospective reader in the story. It serves as a ‘hook’ that compels readers to read the text (in this case, the blurb) when they feel they are involved in the story or text. In the redefined list, other plural personal pronouns are considered as discerned from the corpora realizing the same purpose of the address form *you*. In addition, these demonstrate social distance. By using the pronouns, *blurbers* denote inclusivity which helps establish proximity with the potential reader.

*Subjective: we, you they*

*Objective: us, you, them*

*Possessive: our/ours, your/yours/ their/theirs*

“What **you** will find in common in these eleven stories is a love for the myths, epics, and legends which reflect **us**, contain **us**, call to **us**...”  
(*Alternative Alamat: Stories Inspired by Philippine Mythology* by Paolo Chikiamco)

“Samahan **natin** si Eya sa nakakaloka niyang adventure sa Willford Academy!” (*Diary ng Panget* by HaveYouSeenThisGirL)

This extends Kaplan (1966) and Pariña (2010) claims the rhetorical tendencies and differences in writing are relatively motivated by culture.

The presented further supports Küçüksakarya (2015) assertion that linguistic devices employed in blurbs are contextually motivated language choices. Positive evaluative adjectives and superlatives add constructive meaning and pursue to attract attention. Intensifiers give additional emotional context and amplify dramatic value. Both ellipsis and personal pronouns attempt to create a relationship between the blurber or the book per se and the reader.

### **Discourse Conventions**

#### *Author's Reputation*

The reputation of the author, in some ways, mirrors the quality of the work. It could come in a form of the awards won or the achievements of the author in the course of his or her writing career; either which, mentioning these in the blurb can pin attributes to the book, for instance, mentioning that Nick Joaquin and Ricky Lee are two of the highly acclaimed writers in the history of Filipino fictionists. In the act of persuasion, *ethos* or credibility is a major element.

“A classic from **National Artist for Literature**, Nick Joaquin...” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

“Ito ang unang nobela ni Ricky Lee, **premyadong scriptwriter ng mga klasikong pelikula** gaya ng Himala, Moral, Anak at iba pa...” (*Para kay B* by Ricky Lee)

#### *Writing Qualities and Style*

In this discourse convention, one can praise the author or be trivial about his or her writing qualities and style to pique the potential reader's interest. In the examples below, the first one (*Cave and Shadows*) denotes that the author writes adeptly, showing his proficiency and talent in the field while the second example underlines a peculiar writing feature (*Stainless Longganisa*).

“Joaquin expertly weaves multi-layered meanings by interspersing Philippine historical fact with fiction.” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

“...*ipinagpapatuloy ni Bob Ong sa librong ito ang kanyang ikalimang pakakamali -- ang magkwento tungkol sa sarili niyang mga libro, bagay na di ginagawa ng mga matitinong manunulat.*” (*Stainless Longganisa* by Bob Ong)

*Translation: "...in this book, Bob Ong continues his fifth mistake -- to tell stories about his own books, something that sensible writers do not do."*  
(*Stainless Longganisa* by Bob Ong)

#### *Guarantee for the book*

In the corpora, this discourse convention pins attribute to the book by speaking for its quality beyond positive evaluative comments and by supporting it with credible facts and legitimate surveys like having sold 500 copies right after it came out of press (*Sarcophagus and Other Stories*) and becoming a bestseller abroad (*The Samsons: The Pretenders and Mass*).

"The first edition of 500 copies sold out shortly after publication."  
(*Sarcophagus and Other Stories* by Jose Y. Dalisay Jr.)

"Popular abroad, Mass was a bestseller in Holland, for example." (*The Samsons: The Pretenders and Mass* by F. Sionil Jose)

#### *Effect of the book to the reader*

Highlighting the effect of the book to the reader is one way of attributing qualities to the book and values from its content. Here, the writer projects what the reader can get from reading inside – which eventually would mean, from considering purchasing the item.

"In the end, readers discover faith, truth, and human nature." (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

"...this work of imagination takes the reader on a magical excursion into Philippine life and history" (*Salamanca* by Dean Francis Alfar)

#### *Excerpts*

Especially powerful meaningful sentences, as Gea-Valor (2005) words it. Excerpts are short extracts from the book and in blurbs, these functions as a curiosity arouser by giving key elements of the plot to pique the potential reader's interest.

"I'll make you fall in love with me, Katherine. Maybe then... you'll stay."  
(*Be My Love, Katherine* by Martha Cecilia)

"When Lance Navarro whispered "I do...," Erika Rose saw hatred and contempt in his eyes." (*Kristine Series 18: Rose Tattoo I* by Martha Cecilia)

*Rhetorical questions*

A rhetorical question is another example of a curiosity arouser. It is used to influence the potential reader through posing a question asked not for the answer, but the dramatic effect – subtly giving key elements of the plot to emphasize something or just to get the potential reader thinking, piquing on their interests.

“...Hanggang sa ang bata ay hindi na bata kundi ama, o ina, ano ang ituuro niya ngayon sa kanyang mga anak?” (*Bata, Bata... Pa’no Ka Ginawa?* by Lualhati Bautista)

“Will they be the living proof that opposites really attract?” (*My Husband is a Mafia Boss* by YanaJin)

*Imperatives*

Imperatives in book blurbs are not commands but are rather impositions, and it does not just recommend the book to the potential reader but serves as an invitation by addressing them directly. It has been found only once in the corpora.

“Samahan natin si Eya sa nakakaloka niyang adventure sa Willford Academy!” (*Diary ng Panget* by HaveYouSeenThisGirL)

*Expression of Novelty*

This discourse convention is first defined by Marčiulionienė(2005). Expression of novelty poses the innovative quality – something being new and fresh is interesting. These are often projected using adjectives such as for the first time, new, up-to-date, fresh, latest, etc.

“...which the poet and critic Ricaredo Demetillo called the **first** great Filipino novels written in English” (*Dusk* by F. Sionil Jose)

“Alternative Alamat gathers stories, by contemporary authors of Philippine fantasy, which make innovative use of elements of Philippine mythology.  
“(Alternative Alamat by Paolo Chikiamco)

*Expression of Uniqueness*

Also introduced by Marčiulionienė (2005), expression of uniqueness and rarity poses the idiosyncratic value – something distinctive and particular is special. These are often projected using adjectives such as unequaled, original, one of the few, rare, a few equals, etc.

“... Yet too few of these tales are known and read today... None of these stories are straight re-telling of the old tales” (*Alternative Alamat* by Paolo Chikiamco)

#### *Genre-marker*

This discourse convention is one of the most common language practices and expressions present in Filipino fiction book blurbs – the underlining of the genre of the work. It provides only minimal information without giving away the story, compelling the potential reader to make the purchase – as to how Kathpalia (1997) defines a good blurb.

“...this literary whodunit is still considered a must-read by students of Philippine Literature.” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

“Definitely a political novel.” (*Dekada '70* by Lualhati Bautista)

#### *Awards won by the book*

Surprisingly, there was no explicit mention of awards won by the book in any of the blurbs analyzed. Nevertheless, this would still be reflected in the redefined model because most of the books, where the blurbs are collected from, are not popular for no reason – these are award-winning novels, and some have even been adapted on screen. An implication would be, mentioning these achievements in a second or third release book cover would entice more potential readers since stating the awards won by book guarantees its quality.

### **Emergent Themes, Rhetorical Structure, and Deviations in the Blurbs of Filipino Fiction Books**

This paper also explores emergent themes, rhetorical moves, and deviations prevalent in popular Filipino fiction book blurbs. According to Muhammad (2015), blurbs are topic-controlled, hence the textual features, as well as the generic structure, are subject to variation depending on the theme of the book.

The popular Filipino fiction books selected and their respective blurbs under the decade 1980 are mostly historical-political novels and centers on Philippine history as early as the American occupation until the Marcos regime. Even in the blurbs under the succeeding two decades, the historical-political theme is still present. However, socio-cultural and romantic novels started to emerge. The blurbs under the last decade no longer attended to history and what became more prevalent is the romance genre. These findings reflect the shifting interest of the Filipinos throughout the decades.

As observed in the corpora, Filipino fiction book blurbs are more informational rather than promotional and often parade synopses of the stories. In relation to the prevalent themes observed, this realization is strengthened. In the first decade, with blurbs that mostly address the historical-political theme, the presentational relations background, concession, and motivation are frequently employed. In the next decade, with blurbs that mostly address culture, background is notably recurring. In the third decade, background, concession, and motivation are also the presentational relations frequently employed. In the last decade, with blurbs that predominantly centers on the romantic theme, background and motivation are recurring. From here, we can see the consistent employment of the presentational relation background, which is more informational rather than promotional.

Anchored on Maan and Thompson's (1986) Rhetorical Structure Theory, the analyses reveal that the presentational relations are more intentional but still encompasses the informational facet. This supports Cacchiani (2007) claim that blurbs two communicative purposes, informational and promotional, intertwines and overlap with each other. These means to achieve an effect on the reader and are more rhetoric in nature. The presentational relations in the blurbs include Background, Concession, Enablement, Evidence, Justification, and Motivation.

**Table 2:** Presentational Relations in Popular Filipino Fiction Book Blurbs from 1980 – present

	1980 – 1989	1990 – 1999	2000 – 2009	2010 – present
Themes	<i>Historical-Political</i>	<i>Historical- Political; Culture and Society; Romance</i>	<i>Historical- Political; Culture and Society; Romance</i>	<i>Romance</i>
	%	%	%	%
Background	80	100	100	100
Concession	80	20	80	40
Enablement	-	-	-	20
Evidence	40	40	40	-
Justification	20	-	-	-
Motivation	40	40	60	80

### *Background*

Background, or the display of a text facilitating understanding, increases the ability to know the plot of the story from reading the blurb. This relation helps in the presentation of discourse convention genre-marker and other parts of the blurb that entrenches the plot to the potential reader, weaving the informative and promotional intent contemporaneously.

“Killing time in a warm place is a novel of growing up in the Philippines during the Marcos years.” (*Killing Time in a Warm Place* by Jose Y. Dalisay Jr.)

“The novel is set in motion by a mysterious death and thrust onwards by the search for truth and the solution of the crime.” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

### *Concession*

Concession, or the display of ideas affirmed by the author increasing positive regard, are an act or instance of conceding and acknowledging something to be true and factual. This relation often helps in the presentation of expression of novelty, writing qualities and style, expression of uniqueness, and effect of the book to the reader.

“It is a daring and inventive debut by a new writer of astonishing talent.” (*Illustrado* by Miguel Syjuco)

“Joaquin expertly weaves multi-layered meanings by interspersing Philippine historical fact with fiction.” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

“None of these stories are straight re-tellings of the old tales...” (*Alternative Alamat: Stories Inspired by Philippine Mythology* by Paolo Chikiamco)

“In the end, readers discover faith, truth, and human nature.” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

### *Enablement*

Enablement, or the display of an aid needed for the reader to perform an action that increases ability, helps in providing an approach or an opportunity for the potential reader to read further inside and to eventually purchase the book. This relation helps in presenting the discourse convention imperatives. The line “*Samahan natin si Eya sa nakakaloka niyang adventure...*” of the blurb is suggestive of inviting the potential reader to know more about the leading character’s story.

“Samahan natin si Eya sa nakakaloka niyang adventure sa Willford Academy!” (*Diary ng Panget* by Have You Seen This Girl)

### *Evidence*

Evidence, or the display of information intended to increase the reader’s belief, pins attribute to the book and guarantees its quality by providing facts and valid information. This relation helps in presenting the discourse convention guarantee for the book and the author’s reputation.



“The first edition of 500 copies sold out shortly after publication.”  
(*Sarcophagus and Other Stories* by Jose Y. Dalisay Jr.)

“A classic from National Artist for Literature, Nick Joaquin...” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

The first sample above gives additional emotional context by displaying the adverb **shortly** and emphasizes that the sales of the book are more than satisfactory, and the second one highlights the reputation of the author, implying the work is written by a renowned figure in the industry and hence, commendable – both presenting credible statements attesting to the quality of the work.

### *Justification*

Justification, or the display of information supporting the author’s claim which increases acceptance, sometimes comes hand in hand with the presentational relation evidence. Evidence increases belief and justification herein, increases acceptance of that belief.

“A classic from National Artist for Literature, Nick Joaquin, *Cave and Shadows* was first published in 1983, and this literary whodunit is still considered a must-read by students of Philippine Literature.” (*Cave and Shadows* by Nick Joaquin)

Evidence in the example above is projected in the word “classic” – denoting a work is of recognized and established value and increases belief. It was supported by the phrase “considered a must-read by students of Philippine Literature”, which increases acceptance of that belief.

### *Motivation*

Motivation, or the display of information intended to increase the reader’s desire to act and move toward a goal, of which in this context is to read further inside and to purchase the book, helps in presenting curiosity arousers excerpts and rhetorical questions, and guarantee for the book. It also helps in presenting the inclusive facet personal pronouns offers.

"I'll make you fall in love with me, Katherine. Maybe then... you'll stay."  
(*Be My Love*, Katherine by Martha Cecilia)

“Will they be the living proof that opposites really attract?” (*My Husband is a Mafia Boss* by YanaJin)

Furthermore, what makes this study distinct from previous studies, aside from its corpora, is its focus – the realization of the promotional intent by deliberating not only on

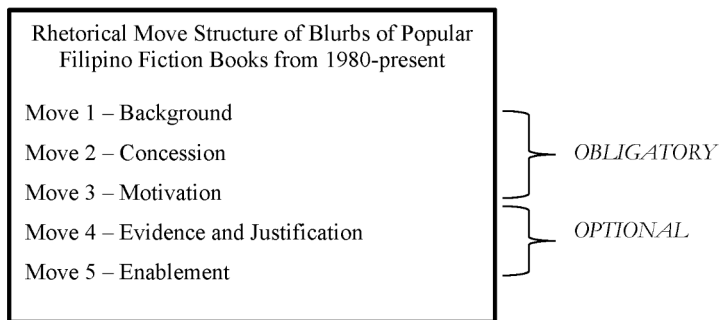
*what* schemes are presented but also on *how* these schemes are presented. This further elaborates the intertwining of the informative and persuasive intent of book blurbs that even with focusing on the latter, the first-mentioned will still be reflected.

**Table 3:** Rhetorical Structure of Popular Filipino Fiction Book Blurbs from 1980 – present

	MI	MII	MIII	MIV	MV	MVI	MVII	MVIII	MIX
Background	12	6	6	1	3		3		
Concession	1	5	1	2		1		1	1
Enablement								1	
Evidence	2	2		2		2			
Justification		1							
Motivation	5	5	4	1	1	1			

Table 3 shows that from among the presentational relations, there is no question in designating presentational relation **background** as the first move in the rhetoric structure of blurbs in popular Filipino Fiction books. What follows could either be **concession** or **motivation**.

In assigning what move number enablement and justification will fall under, the researchers have considered the realizations of the presentational relations in relation to linguistic devices and discourse conventions. Presentational relations **Evidence** and **justification** often come together – evidence increases belief, strengthened with justification which increases acceptance of this belief. Hence, the justification will be assigned along with evidence as to the fourth move, conceded with enablement. The hierarchical presentational move structure is summarized hereafter, with the first three being obligatory and the last two being optional.



**Figure 2:** Rhetorical Move Structure of Filipino Fiction Book Blurbs

The most important contribution of this paper is revealing how Filipino blurb writers persuade their readers to buy or read the popular Filipino Fiction books, based on the analyses of the selected corpora.

**Table 4:** Emerging Patterns of Popular Filipino Fiction Book Blurbs Presentational Relations and Textual Features

Presentational Relations	Discourse Conventions	Linguistic Devices
Background	Genre-marker	
Concession	Expression of Uniqueness Expression of Novelty Writing qualities and style Effect of the book to the reader	Positive evaluative adjectives Superlatives Intensifiers
Enablement	Imperatives	Personal pronouns
Evidence, Justification	Author's reputation Guarantee for the book	Positive evaluative adjectives Intensifiers
Motivation	Excerpt Rhetorical Questions	

Filipino writers persuade readers to read or purchase the book by presenting a background – about the awards won by the author and the book itself, the genre of the book, and other parts of the blurb that entrenches the plot to the potential reader. The presentational relation background delivers a genre-marker which creates a balance between the informative and persuasive function of book blurbs. This supports Cruz's (n.d.) findings that the persuasive strategies Filipinos employ are a combination of logical and emotional appeals. It also establishes that Filipino readers are believed to go for information first before getting hold of the book. Aside from this, Filipino blurb writers display opinions that increase positive regard. This is usually done by pitching personal evaluative comments and ideas. Concession expresses novelty and uniqueness, highlights the writing qualities and style, and effect of the book to the reader through the display of positive evaluative adjectives, superlatives, and intensifiers. This move also becomes more like the voice of the author attempting to corroborate anticipated questions from readers. This is followed more commonly with the third move, motivation, which heightens readers' desire to do something or to read the entire book by piquing on the potential reader's interest through curiosity arousers, excerpts, and rhetorical questions.

Other than these three moves in writing blurbs, Filipino writers also include information (actual evidence like record-breaking sales and awards) as well as justification that aims to increase readers' belief about the author or the book. Evidence and Justification highlight the author's reputation which also presents the informational intent of book blurbs, the same presentational relations underlines guarantee for the book through positive evaluative adjectives and intensifiers. This is followed by suggesting a positive action from the reader which is to read or buy the book. This move fully satisfies the communicative aim of the blurb, which is to persuade readers to act. Enablement delivers imperatives which manipulates the conclusive culture of personal pronouns.

### **Other Observations in the Book Blurbs about Filipino Fiction Books**

It is worth mentioning that out of the twenty blurbs, eleven are written in full English, five in full Filipino, and four code-switched between English and Filipino – dependent on the language of the book except for Lualhati Bautista's *Dekada '70*. Also, intensifiers are all in English and none in Filipino even in Filipino and code-switched blurbs. This could suggest that in creating or adding constructive meaning, Filipinos are more expressive in the English language. The marginal employment of superlatives in the corpora depicts the difference between foreign book blurbs and Filipino book blurbs and implies that Filipinos are not too permissive in taking the words they modify to the highest degree. In the use of personal pronouns, there are more in English than in Filipino. However, in Gea-Valor's (2005) presentational strategies, only the address form 'you' is presented supported that it attempts to involve the prospective reader in the story. In the corpora of this paper, other personal pronouns like 'we', 'us', 'ours', etc. are realized with the same intent. This elaborates on the communal culture of the Filipinos and how this inclusive facet is emulated in their writing style. In ways, this show how Filipino *blurbers* are comparatively distinct with regard to their persuasive writing approach and convention preferences.

Filipino blurb writers consistently include the Effect of the book to the reader, Rhetorical questions, and Genre-marker in writing the blurbs from 1980-present. The display of imperatives and expression of uniqueness were found only in blurbs of books written within 2010 – present. The Expression of novelty was observed in blurbs of books written within 1980 – 1989 and within 2000 – present.

The discourse conventions Author's reputation, Writing qualities and style, and Guarantee for the book are only presented within 1980 – 2009. One probable reason behind the declining display of the author's reputation could be the emergence of Wattpad books whose authors are just starting to establish themselves in the industry. The marginal employment of excerpts also depicts the difference between foreign book blurbs and Filipino book blurbs and implies that Filipinos are not too permissive with displaying excerpts as a curiosity arouser.

The projection of a genre-marker is present in the four decades. This discourse convention provides only minimal information without giving away the story and its consistent employment suggests the intertwining of both informational and promotional intents of book blurbs. The same with the linguistic features, the decade with the least employment of discourse conventions is 1990 – 1999 while the other three decades displayed a significant similar number. The reason for this fluctuating number is unknown since the explored areas of Filipino fiction book blurbs and its discussions do not align with this matter. It does not show any relation neither with the prevalent genre of the decade nor the length of the blurbs.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussing not only what schemes are presented, but also how these are presented in the attempt to realize the persuasive function of book blurbs to shed light on effective blurb writing, and pondering on the historical context of blurb composition in Philippine literary fiction and the Filipino writing style it reflects – this paper presented a redefined list of strategies and a presentational rhetorical move structure which can be regarded as exemplary and hence, can be used as a model for further researches.

This paper also manifested the deviating interest emulated from the shifting themes, the attitude towards creating and adding constructive meaning, and the communal culture of the Filipinos.

The linguistic devices prevalent in the corpus are positive evaluative adjectives, superlatives, intensifiers, elliptical structure, and personal pronouns. The discerned textual features reflect the writing style of Filipinos – inclusivity from personal pronouns and attitude towards the use of boosters from intensifiers and superlatives. Filipino blurb writers tend to be less permissive when it comes to modifying words to the highest degree. The language practices in popular Filipino fiction book blurbs, as exhibited through discourse conventions, include writing about the author's reputation and writing qualities and style; guarantee for the book; genre-markers; awards won by the book; effect of the book to readers; excerpts from the book; rhetorical questions and imperatives directed towards readers; and expression of novelty and uniqueness – with the first half encompassing the informational function and the other half presenting the promotional intent.

Filipino blurb writers start by presenting information about the book and its author, followed by pitching personal evaluative comments and ideas about the book and by amplifying the reader's desire to purchase and to read inside the book. Other than these, Filipino writers also include actual evidence and justification to guarantee quality and directly invites people to read more.

Though these strategies and moves are leaning towards persuasion, it does not only realize the promotional intent but also the informative intent. This paper has further established that the two communicative functions of book blurbs intertwine with each other and some informative elements are present in persuasive functions.

There is also an emerging pattern which further supports Muhammad's (2015) assertion that blurbs are topic-controlled, and textual features as well as the generic structure are subject to variation depending on the theme of the book. Also, the linguistic features employed have a great impact on the rhetorical structure in the blurbs – linguistic devices are manipulated in discourse conventions, and discourse conventions are delivered through presentational relations. For further studies, the researchers recommend impact analysis, the

assessment of the efficiency of every strategy in this paper to see which among the presented is/are the more inviting and enticing.

The realizations on the persuasive faculty of book blurbs in this study can eventually help publishers and authors to better market their works. With the all-encompassing and far-reaching technology and websites to promote and sell books, the use of blurbs as a marketing tool does not only contribute to the book's point of sale and at the same time, to the publishing industry but it also situates Filipino work worldwide. The researchers also recommend looking into the rhetorical online structure of blurbs in websites that promote and sell books like Amazon and Barnes and Noble – analyzing beyond the blurb and considering other presentational schemes present in the webpage like product presentation, incentives offer, and costumers' reviews to explore the virtual advertising discourse of book blurbs.

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