

E. Ye. Mintsys
Vasyl Stefanyk National Precarpathian University, Ivano-Frankivsk

BLURB AS A PARATEXTUAL ELEMENT

Елла Мінцис. 'Blurb' як паратекстуальний елемент. У статті проаналізовано такий паратекстуальний елемент як 'blurb' (видавниче рекламне оголошення) на матеріалі американського юридичного трилера; узагальнені існуючі лінгвістичні дослідження цього явища; визначені його жанрові та лінгвостилістичні особливості.

Ключові слова: видавниче рекламне оголошення, паратекст, епітекст, перітекст, паратекстуальний елемент, стилістичний засіб, юридичний трилер.

Элла Минцис. 'Blurb' как паратекстуальный элемент. В статье проанализирован такой паратекстуальный элемент как 'blurb' (издательское рекламное объявление) на материале американского юридического триллера; обобщены существующие лингвистические исследования этого явления; определены его жанровые и лингвостилистические особенности.

Ключевые слова: издательское рекламное объявление, паратекст, эпитекст, перитекст, паратекстуальный элемент, стилистический прием, юридический триллер.

Ella Mintsys. Blurb as a paratextual element. The article deals with the analysis of the blurb (a review excerpt placed on the book cover and on the opening pages) as a paratextual element. It discusses its various definitions, generalizes the existing results of linguistic researches of this phenomenon, points out its dual nature (i.e. belonging to the both paratextual categories, peritext and epitext), and defines its genre-making and linguostylistic peculiarities. The review extract-based blurbs from five legal thrillers 'The Partner', 'The Pelican Brief', 'The Rainmaker', 'The Runaway Jury', and 'The Street Lawyer' by John Grisham serve as the empirical material for the research. The present paper investigates the common strategies characterizing the promotional genre of book blurbs (description and evaluation) as well as the common features shared by the

paratextual elements in question: performing promotional and to some extent informative functions, all of them are aimed at attracting, intriguing, persuading and tempting the reader by means of ‘contextually motivated language choices’ as well as ‘emotive and forceful style’, a wide range of expressive means and stylistic devices (phonetic, lexical and syntactical) which are typical of the language of the legal thrillers’ blurbs. Among the stylistic devices that serve as the readers’ ‘eye catchers’ are epithets, metaphors, parallelisms and inversions.

Key words: review extract-based blurbs, paratext, epitext, peritext, paratextual element, stylistic device, legal thriller.

One of the main contemporary trends in linguistic research is a complex text analysis on all the levels of its structural-semantic organization and functioning. It is characterized by a growing interest in the role of paratext, which testifies to the **topicality** of the present paper. The basis for most of the researches related to the issues of text architectonics and composition (M. Bakhtin, N. Fateyeva, M. Glovinski, O. Lazaresku, Yu. Lotman, V. Zhyrminski, etc.) was G. Genette’s narratological theory which comprised analysis of the paratext.

G. Genette was the first to introduce the concept of the paratext in *Palimpsestes* (1982) and explained how paratextual elements enable a text to become a book and be of interest to its readers. The range of paratextual elements is vast. In his work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, the scholar singles out various paratextual elements. Valerie Pellatt in the introduction to the book *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation* points out that the most visible categories of paratext include the footnote or endnote, the preface and foreword, the introduction and the epilogue or afterword. Less visible, but equally powerful types of paratext are the contents pages, the index, titles and subtitles, chapter synopses, and blurb or dust jacket, and flap. Each of these elements influences the reader to a greater or lesser degree [14]. Discussing the etymology of the term ‘paratext’, G. Genette dwells upon the polysemy of the prefix ‘para’ which is associated with the contradictory character of the paratext itself: “ ‘Para’ is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and

difference, interiority and exteriority ... something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold, or margin, and also beyond it ... A thing in 'para', moreover, ... is also the boundary itself, the screen which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside" [9].

Over the past decades, literary theory has gradually been moving from a writer-oriented perspective to the current poststructuralist reader-focused view. The author is the figure in charge of the paratexts that surround the core text, and he indirectly controls their influence on the text [3]. Scholars investigating the text and the reader's interaction with it, consider that it cannot exist without its environment, paratext, which they call a 'threshold', a 'vestibule', 'reinforcement and accompaniment', 'adornment', 'a fringe of the printed text', etc. Genette defines paratext as "a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that ... is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" [18]. The general denomination of paratext can be divided into two subcategories: 1) the peritext, which 'necessarily has a location that can be situated in relation to the location of the text itself', can be found 'within the same volume' and includes everything between or on the covers (the author's name, the title, blurbs, cover illustrations, dust jackets, dedications, the preface, chapter titles, maps, authorial appendices, afterwords, footnotes, glossaries, etc.); 2) the epitext, which comprises elements that do not appear inside the book or anywhere its direct surroundings, i.e. not physically attached to it (interviews, reviews, literary criticism, conversations, letters, diaries and others) [2; 15; 16]. Both the paratextual subcategories can be produced either by the author of a work or by his publisher.

One of the paratextual elements which is in the focus of the present paper is a *blurb*, that is made of book-review excerpts. It serves advertizing purposes and is aimed at enticing the reader. Thus, the **aim** of the paper is a complex analysis of *review extract-based blurbs*. The purpose presupposes performing such **tasks**: to generalize the existing researches of blurbs; to define the dual nature of review

extract-based blurbs; to single out their genre and linguostylistic peculiarities. The **novelty** of our research is caused by the fact that the blurb has not been previously subjected to systematic and complex analysis.

The origin of the word *blurb* goes back to 1907, when American humorist Gelett Burgess's book *Are You a Bromide?*, was published. On the dust jacket there was a picture of a young woman Miss Belinda Blurb 'shown calling out, as in the act of blurbing' [18]. Since that time the word has come to denote 'a short publicity notice (as on a book jacket)' [17]; 'a short description giving information about a book, new product, etc.' [11]; 'information printed on the outside of something, especially something for sale such as a book, to describe it or make it attractive to buy' [12]. All the definitions of blurbs imply that they are 'sales tools essentially aimed to advertize and sell' [13], because they bear 'an impress from the producers of the commodity and are thus often doubly demonstrative' [16]. Blurbs came into being 'with the advent of the mass-produced paperback' [13]. There have been done a number of researches of blurbs from different perspectives. For example, V. K. Bhatia compares communicative purposes of book blurbs from academic and fiction works. L. M. Gea-Valor investigates publishers' web site ads from Penguin, Ballantine, Routledge, and Barnes & Noble publishing companies. S. S. Kathpalia analyzes blurbs from a cross-cultural perspective by comparing those printed by international and local publishers. S. Cacchiani studies evaluative language in 'lazy reads' blurbs, S. Gesuato – evaluative language in back-cover blurbs of academic books on biology, engineering, education and linguistics. H. Basturkmen compares book blurbs in EFL textbooks published in New Zealand. V. Marciulioniere's research deals with fiction book blurbs from a diachronic perspective. B. Andersen investigates reference works' blurbs (dictionary, encyclopedia) [1].

The present paper analyzes review extract-based blurbs from five legal thrillers *The Partner* [4], *The Pelican Brief* [5], *The Rainmaker* [6], *The Runaway Jury* [7], and *The Street Lawyer* [8] by John Grisham. The analysis of 57 blurbs shows that they are 'split-and-spread' in structure and occur in various positions:

mostly on the back, the inside front covers and the initial pages, occasionally on the back covers of the books.

We make an assumption that blurbs of this type have a dual nature. In terms of their location (in/on the book), they belong to the peritext. But taking into consideration their sources (book reviews from newspapers, journals, magazines, which occur outside the book), they can be qualified as the elements of epitext.

It is notable that all the analyzed blurbs share a number of common features. Performing promotional functions, all of them are aimed at attracting, intriguing, persuading and tempting the reader by means of ‘contextually motivated language choices’ as well as ‘emotive and forceful style’ [13]. Although none of the blurbs contains specific indication of the audience, some of them are personalized by the noun ‘reader’ and pronouns ‘you’ and ‘we’: *Keeps **readers** hooked. ... A new thriller to keep **you** occupied until the wee hours of the morning (The Columbus Dispatch); On its very first page, The Partner roars to life ... the **reader** is transfixed (Chicago Sun-Times). The plot surges forward, pulling **us** along as **we** turn those pages a mile a minute (San Francisco Chronicle). Besides, there are examples where the author of the review appeals directly to the audience by means of an imperative sentence: **Don’t start** it unless you are prepared to stay up all night (The Atlanta Journal and Constitution).*

Most of the blurbs are characterized by highly expressive vocabulary with evaluative meaning and emotive charge, describing the author’s (*skillful, masterful, faithful, thoughtful best*) and the books’ and their plots’ (*gripping and suspenseful, exciting, irresistible, entertaining, thought-provoking, sophisticated, ingenious, enjoyable, admirable, smart, fast, terrific, fabulous, brilliant, serious, timely, compelling*) merits and adding to the character sketch (*tough-minded, memorable, colourful, quirky, sympathetic*). Qualifying adjectives make the bulk of that vocabulary. They are used to impress on the reader the idea that the book is worth reading. Simultaneously with the evaluative lexicon there occasionally occur the terms which give the reader a hint concerning the genre and theme of the novel:

courtroom savvy, courtroom thriller, a case and a courtroom drama, legal system, legal-eagle, lawyers and assassins.

Another common lexical feature of the analyzed blurbs, giving evidence of the merits of the books which are sure to arouse the readers' interest, is the use of the phrase *to turn pages* in various syntactical positions: *A genuine **page-turner** (The New York Times Book Review); There is a propulsiveness to his narrative that keeps the **pages turning** briskly (People); Grisham keeps you **turning those pages** (The San Francisco Examiner); **Page-turningly** entertaining (Kentucky Post); The plot surges forward, pulling us along as we **turn pages** a mile a minute (San Francisco Chronicle).* There are a number of lexical units emphasizing that there is a lot of action in John Grisham's legal thrillers, dynamic plots full of suspense and tension, which is a characteristic feature of this genre: *a **fast-paced thriller**; **kaleidoscope** action; **hyperkinetic** narrative; **snappy** pacing; the pace is **fast**; Grisham provides enough **suspense** to make **the pages fly**; **nail-biting tension**; **wrenching suspense**; Grisham stacks his "Jury" with **suspense**; ending with **suspense and mystery**; **propels** *The Pelican Brief* **forward at breakneck speed**; a **suspenseful novel**; the plot **surges forward**; **breakneck** fashion; constant **tension**.*

The following examples mentioning the time the readers will presumably spend on reading Grisham's novels contain evidence of irresistibility of his works: *A new thriller to keep you occupied **until the wee hours of the morning** (The Columbus Dispatch); Don't start it unless you're prepared to stay up **all night** (The Atlanta Journal and Constitution); Each book jacket should bear a warning to consumers: "Detrimental to sleep. You may read **all night**" (The Atlanta Constitution); This is a good book worth staying awake **all night** (Salisbury Post); Grisham style – conspiracy in high places, evil and innocent lawyers, assassins and a plot that will keep you reading **into the small hours of the morning** (The Cincinnati Post).*

Some of the analyzed blurbs mention the author's sense of humor which finds reflection in his novels with the aim of entertaining and surprising the readers who are sure to have fun while reading: *Grisham remains faithful to his story, and*

continues to surprise the reader happily ... with frequent dollops of humor ... (The Philadelphia Inquirer); Beyond its entertainment value (Los Angeles Times); The pace is fast, the characters quirky, the result entertaining (USA Today); ... By adding plenty of humor ... he has made this new novel [The Rainmaker] his most sheerly entertaining and enjoyable to date (Buffalo News); The Rainmaker marks a return to Grisham's ... devilish sense of fun (Memphis Flyer); This is Grisham in full command of telling a wickedly fun tale (Nashvill Banner); Grisham creates courtroom scenes of high humor and intense drama ... (Daily News). However, entertaining the readers is a minor purpose of Grisham's novels. Their major aim is to make them consider the serious message and vital social problems raised in his works, criticism of human vices and the vices of American society: A suspense novel with a social conscience ... the true strength of the novel is that it deals with a serious social issue – homelessness – a topic the author addresses with genuine sympathy and considerable earnestness (Legal Times); The Rainmaker can be read as a portrait of contemporary America (Los Angeles Times); Timely ... There's no doubt that Grisham has his finger on the pulse of America (Orlando Sentinel); Grisham is one of the few writers who accurately and empathetically describes working-class Americans of all races and both sexes (USA Today); There is a serious message in this novel ... (Daily News); ... Account of rampart corruption, bureaucratic manipulation and ordinary greed (St. Louis Post-Dispatch).

Another peculiarity of the author's style which is praised in the analyzed blurbs is his dialogue: *Grisham has an ear for dialogue and is a skillful craftsman (The New York Times Book Review); The story unfolds in breakneck fashion with those wonderful pages-long passages of taut Grisham dialogue (Chicago Sun-Times).* A number of blurbs predict the novels' success and popularity among the readers: *...The story's smoothness and situations will make the reader fall in love with Grisham's writing again (Salisbury Post); An event-filled tale that works hard to please and largely succeeds (The Wall Street Journal); A success ... (Seattle Times); ... The Street Lawyer will be his biggest hit yet (Entertainment Weekly); The Street Lawyer hits the ground on the dead run (The San Diego*

Union-Tribune). In others we can find reference to Grisham's previous novels which were extremely successful, which implies their no less success: *Mr. Grisham's most sympathetic hero and most engrossing premise since his first runaway success, **The Firm** ... (The Wall Street Journal); John Grisham has combined many of the best qualities of his previous novels to write an entertaining and credible courtroom thriller (Chicago Tribune); ... The Rainmaker will be John Grisham's most popular novel since **The Firm** (USA Today); Fabulous ... It's as compulsively readable as **all the others** (Arizona Daily Star); Melding the courtroom story of **A Time to Kill** with the psychological nuance of **The Chamber**, ... this bittersweet tale ... shows that Grisham's imagination can hold its own in a courtroom as well as on the violent streets outside (Publishers Weekly).*

Analyzing the peculiarities of style of review extract-based blurbs, it is worth mentioning that most of them are characterized by the so-called superlativism [10], an inclination for overstatement, the use of words of the highest degree of recognition or praise. By means of the adjectives in the superlative degree the blurbs indicate the author's uniqueness, rating him as an author of universal acclaim, emphasizing the strengths of his style and plots: *his **best-plotted** novel; the **best** American storyteller; **most** barbed book; **most** entertaining; **most** sympathetic hero; the **best** qualities; the **best-known** thriller writers; his **biggest** hit; **most** popular novel*. Blurbs also manage to catch the reader's eye by means of the use of idiomatic expressions: *to grab sb's attention, chills and spills, turns and twists, a mare's nest, red herrings, to hit the ground, to roar to life*. To another 'eye-catcher' belong nonce words and compounds because they stand out as extraordinary and highly emotive: *unputdownable, heartstopping, nail-biting, breakneck, etc.*

The analyzed blurbs are characterized by sets of oppositions which reveal the 'versatility of the author, address to universality of the book and indirectly imply its possible attractiveness to a wide range of readers' [13]: *So gripping that you start reading the **top** of the page afraid of what you'll read at the **bottom** (The Commercial Appeal); It's got the unmistakable Grisham style – conspiracy in high*

places, **evil** and **innocent** lawyers ... (*The Cincinnati Post*); ... By adding **plenty** of humor and a **smidgen** of romance, he has made this new novel his most sheerly entertaining and enjoyable to date (*Buffalo News*); Grisham dots his story with colorful characters just real enough to make you **weep** when they **stumble** and **laugh** with joy when they **win** ... (*Salisbury Post*).

In addition, a range of expressive means and stylistic devices (phonetic, lexical and syntactical) are typical of the language of the legal thrillers' blurbs. They contribute to their eloquence and expressiveness in their own way. For example, *alliteration* adds to the rhythm and dynamism of the narration: *the story's smoothness and situations; constructed a case and a courtroom drama; will probably be the books; make you wweep when they stumble and laugh with joy when they win; turn the pages a mile a minute.*

Among lexical stylistic devices which are of great stylistic value and are most frequently used in the blurbs, are *epithets* expressed by adjectives and adverbs. They reveal the blurbers' evaluation of the author's style, plots, and characters. The epithets occur singly: *colorful characters, a terrific book*; in pairs: *cleverly and powerfully, entertaining and well-written*; in chains: *smart, fast, stingingly satiric; colorful, restless and realistic*; in a two-step structure – adverb + adjective: *most sheerly entertaining; wickedly fun; masterfully bittersweet; genuinely surprising*; and in phrases: *this cat-and-mouse game*. Extremely showy are the *metaphors*: *Grisham dots his story with colorful characters; 'The Partner' roars to life; Grisham shines; the plot surges forward; Grisham has his finger on the public pulse; the kernel of doubt; keep the reader hooked; plumb social issues; provide narrative juice; Grisham has found a dynamite recipe; to make the pages fly; a masterful amalgam of ingenious plot, hyperkinetic narrative and chilling atmospherics of paranoia*. Sometimes metaphors occur in chains: *this book is a mare's nest, a snarl of human greed and how money talks*. Of interest are instances of *oxymora* which emphasize the contradictive and sophisticated character of Grisham's plots: *bittersweet; a wonderfully cynical account*. Besides, there are instances of *similes* which are colorful and fresh (*a writing style as slick as greased*

Teflon; like a composer, he brings all his themes together), and emphasize the author's perfect style and great writing skill.

The device which lays emphasis on Grisham's great talent, his superiority over other authors, and requires intelligence and erudition on the part of the reader is *allusion*, reference to some famous personalities, events or phenomena. For example, *Grisham brings a degree of freshness to it that the best-known thriller writes – Ludlum, Sanders, et al – have lost in recent years (The Pittsfield Berkshire Eagle)*. Here the blurber compares Grisham to two popular American writers (Robert Ludlum – author of 27 thriller novels; Lawrence Sanders – author of more than 40 mystery and suspense novels) in favor of the former. The next blurb (*Grisham's vivid minor characters and near-Dickensian zeal for mocking pomposity and privilege are apt to endear him to his many readers all over again (Entertainment Weekly)*) implies that John Grisham was nearly as skillful in criticizing the vices of American society as Charles Dickens, who was famous for his criticism of Victorian society. In the blurb *Never before has Grisham used the David-Goliath element so cleverly and powerfully as in the 'Rainmaker' (Buffalo News)* the reader is to find reference to the biblical story of a giant Philistine warrior defeating David, the future king of Israel, which hints at the uncompromising struggle between the main characters of the novel *The Rainmaker*.

Among syntactical devices which make the blurbs more effective and contribute to influencing the reader are: 1) parallelism which makes the blurb more rhythmical and dynamic (*The pace is fast, the characters quirky, the result entertaining (USA Today)*); 2) repetition which is used for emphasis (*Highly, highly recommended (The Montgomery Advertiser)*); 3) rhetorical question which presents a statement in the form of a question and performs the function of persuasion (*Why wait for a possible movie when 'Lawyer' is such a good read? (People)*); 4) inversion which performs the function of suspense, postponing the most important information to the end of the sentence (*Supporting the plot are colorful characters and a writing style ... (Lexington Herald-Leader)*; *On its very*

first page, 'The Partner' roars to life ... (Chicago Sun-Times); 5) emphatic construction (What makes Grisham's legal-eagle suspenseurs unique is the gonzo, fairy-tale glow he gives his staid, conservative settings (Boston Sunday Herald)).

Conclusion. The present paper proves that the book blurb as a paratextual element has not been subjected to complex analysis; it has a dual nature – it simultaneously belongs to peritext and epitext; the common functions of this genre are attracting and tempting the reader by means of commonly shared linguostylistic features. The most frequently used lexical stylistic devices which help to 'hook' the reader are epithets of various structural types. Among syntactical devices the most showy ones are inversions and parallelisms. The **prospects** for the future research consist in comparing linguostylistic peculiarities of blurbs-reviews from books belonging to various genres; analyzing blurbs-synopses from the respective novels.

References

1. Andersen Birger. What Web Ads, Blurbs and Introductions Tell Potential Dictionary Buyers about User Needs and Lexicographic Functions [Electronic resource] / Birger Andersen. – Mode of access : <http://download2.hermes.asb.dk/archive/download/Hermes-49-9-andersen.pdf>
2. Cooke Dervila. Present Pasts : Patric Modiano's (auto)biographical Fictions [Electronic resource] / Dervila Cooke. – Radopi, 2005. – 356 p. – Mode of access : [https://www.google.com.ua/search?tbm=bks&hl=en&q=Cooke+Dervila.+Present+Pasts+%3A+Patric+Modiano's+\(auto\)biographical+Fictions+](https://www.google.com.ua/search?tbm=bks&hl=en&q=Cooke+Dervila.+Present+Pasts+%3A+Patric+Modiano's+(auto)biographical+Fictions+).
3. Coolsaet Sophie. Crossing the Threshold : Reading Authorial and Editorial Paratexts to the Fiction of Hogg, Hawthorne, and James [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access : lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/.../RUG01-001891507_2012_0001_AC.pdf.
4. Grisham John. *The Partner* / John Grisham. – NY : Island Books, 1997. – 468 p.
5. Grisham John. *The Pelican Brief* / John Grisham. – NY : A Dell Book, 2003. – 436 p.

6. Grisham John. *The Rainmaker* / John Grisham. – NY : Island Books, 1995. – 598 p.
7. Grisham John. *The Runaway Jury* / John Grisham. – NY : Island Books, 1996. – 550 p.
8. Grisham John. *The Street Lawyer* / John Grisham. NY : Island Books, 1998. – 452 p.
9. Koenig-Woodyard Chris. *Compte rendu : Gérard Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin and foreword by Richard Macksey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1997. – [Electronic resource] / Chris Koenig-Woodyard. – Mode of access : [www. erudit. org/revue /ron/ 1999/ v/ n13/ 005838ar.html](http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1999/v/n13/005838ar.html).
10. Комлев Н. Г. *Словарь иностранных слов* / Н. Г. Комлев. – М. : Эксмо, 2006. – 672 с.
11. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. UK : Pearson Education Ltd, 2003. – 1950 p.
12. *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. Oxford : Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2002. – 1692 p.
13. Marciulioniene Vesta. *Publisher's Blurb on English Books of Fiction: A Diachronic Genre Analysis* [Electronic resource] / Vesta Marciulioniene. – Mode of access : http://vddb.library.lt/fedora/get/LT-eLABa-0001:J.04~2006~ISSN_1392-561X.N_11.PG_61-71/DS.002.1.01.ARTIC.
14. Pelatt Valerie. *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation* [Electronic resource] / Valerie Pelatt. – Mode of access : www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/60628.pdf.
15. Rudd David. *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (Google eBook) [Electronic resource] / David Rudd. – Routledge, 2012. – 336 p. – Mode of access : [http://books.google.com.ua/ books?id=KcgWV8Q8wE4C&q=paratext#v= snippet&q=epitext%20and%20peritext&f=false](http://books.google.com.ua/books?id=KcgWV8Q8wE4C&q=paratext#v=snippet&q=epitext%20and%20peritext&f=false).

16. Sutherland John. *Bestsellers (Routledge Revivals): Popular Fiction of the 1970s* [Electronic resource] / John Sutherland. – Mode of access : [http:// www.amazon.com/Bestsellers-Routledge-Revivals-Popular-Fiction/dp/ 0415611296](http://www.amazon.com/Bestsellers-Routledge-Revivals-Popular-Fiction/dp/0415611296).
17. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, Massachusetts, USA : G. & C. Merriam Co., 1975. – 1536 p.
18. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access : <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>.