The recent book by Luz Gil-Salom and Carmen Soler-Monreal is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on academic and specialized genres that has proliferated over the past couple of decades. The general interest in this area is partly related to the growing scholarship in the discipline of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and, more specifically, in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), though the present volume does not easily qualify as a collection of applied linguistic papers in these fields. While many of the contributions in the volume deal with academic discourse, the general conception of specialized genres in this book is broader than that, essentially corresponding to Maurizio Gotti’s (2003: 24) definition of “specialized discourse”, which concerns the use of language by specialized communities that include academic, professional, technical and occupational groups.

As indicated by the title of the volume, *Dialogicity in Written Specialised Genres*, the papers share a general understanding of discourse (represented in the individual papers by several kinds of written discourses) as a dialogue between writers and their readers. Methodologically, the book is grounded in recent research in genre analysis and EAP/LSP, particularly where it focuses on various interpersonal and pragmatic phenomena such as evaluation, authorial stance and identity construction (Ivanič 1998; Hyland 1998, 2005, 2009; Hunston & Thompson 2000). Thus, it continues a well-established research orientation that draws on the conceptions of dialogism (Bakhtin 1981), voice (Thompson 1996) and evaluation (Martin & White 2005). This traditional methodological framework for the analysis of dialogism in academic discourse is aptly complemented by new approaches, most notably from pragmatics. Several papers operate with Edda Weigand’s (2009, 2010) theory of dialogic action games, e.g. by considering how writers take into account the readers’ reactive actions that complement their own initiative actions. The methodological synergy, with the contributors to the volume drawing on genre analysis, pragmatics and dialogue studies, is a strong point in this book that is likely to motivate a great deal of further research.
The volume is organized into an introduction, a foreword, an introductory chapter, two parts with four and three research papers, and a conclusion, with each of these sections written by a different author. While the editors themselves provide only a brief introduction, they – somewhat unusually – leave the overview of chapters, the specification of the research questions and the explanation of the rationale behind the volume to a guest contributor, John Flowerdew.

The introductory chapter by Ken Hyland outlines the centrality of dialogic communication in academic writing, which stems from the need to build an appropriate relationship between the writer and the reader. Hyland deals with stance and engagement and the construction of dialogic interactions in research papers from several scientific disciplines. He argues that academic persuasion depends on the writer’s alignment and engagement with readers. This appears to be particularly the case in so-called ‘soft disciplines’, such as the humanities and social sciences, where writers tend to more explicitly construct collegiality and more forcefully project “themselves and their readers into their arguments” (p. 19).

The first part of the book, entitled “Authorial stance and the construction of readership”, contains four papers that all address a similar issue, namely reviews. Taken together, these papers jointly indicate that the discursive practice of ‘reviewing’ has a more central role in the negotiation of the writer’s position than previously thought.

In the opening paper of the section, Carmen Soler-Monreal and Luz Gil-Salom discuss how politeness strategies are used in the ‘literature review’ chapters of PhD theses written by English and Spanish students of computer science. The focus is on reporting structures through which a double-voiced dialogue is established between the thesis writers, the cited authors and the discourse community. While the engagement with previous scholarship in ‘literature review’ chapters demonstrates the writers’ awareness and acknowledgement of the existence of alternative voices, it also brings a need to position oneself with respect to such other voices, since they might represent a threat to one’s current research. To this end, writers use various positive and negative politeness strategies to help them cope with this potentially problematic situation. Based on the analysis of the sorts of citations and reporting verbs that are used, the paper reports several valuable findings. For instance, integral citations (i.e. those incorporated into the text) tend to enhance the writer’s individuality, and various forms of depersonalization efface a direct threat – a strategy for self-protection and self-effacement that shifts, at least partially, the responsibility for the interpretation of the cited authors’ claims to the reader. The analysis also yields some interesting cross-cultural differences: English authors are more open in their display of personal responsibility, with a tendency to highlight other authors’ weaknesses in order to justify their own contributions.
Spanish authors, by contrast, are more likely to avoid direct criticism and personal confrontation, which appears to be a cultural trait.

The subject of the next article is the role of authorial voice in film reviews written by professional and non-professional authors. Adopting the methodology of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White 2005), Marta Carretero considers how the category of Engagement (which includes resources for adjusting and negotiating one’s position) is realized in English and Spanish reviews. It appears that film review writers are poised between two positions, requiring them not only to present their opinions with self-confidence but also to restrain themselves so as not to appear intolerant. Reflecting their personal viewing experience, they need to acknowledge their awareness of the existence of alternate viewpoints, thus hedging their own evaluative statements. The analysis shows that English and Spanish review writers very frequently contrast their original expectations and actual viewing experience of the films, which is linguistically manifested through denial and countering. Some differences between English and Spanish review writers can be observed in the former’s greater use of the Counterfactual category, realized through modal verbs and perfect participles.

A third type of review is analysed in the article by Giuliana Diani, which considers the genre of scholarly ‘book review’ articles with the aim of uncovering the plurality of textual voices. Using English and Italian historical book reviews, she traces how argumentative dialogue is developed between the reviewer, the author of the book, the reader and the broader discourse community of scholars in the field. This is achieved by the reviewer reporting the book author’s discourse through citation, establishing his/her own position (e.g. by means of phrases such as I would argue) and attending to the position of an imaginary reader. The data show that ’book review’ articles are polyphonic textual constructs, with the reviewer adopting the evaluative stance of a “textual interpreter” (p. 107) who engages in a debate with both the author and the community of scholars in a given discipline.

A somewhat different situation obtains in the genre of fiction book reviews, as shown by Maria-Lluïsa Gea-Valor. Working with the premise that the interpersonal dynamics of this genre are different, because of commercial interests, she analyses how attribution and engagement markers are used to construct the identities of the various participants. Among the most interesting findings is the frequent use in fiction book reviews of the inclusive pronoun we, whereby the review writer establishes solidarity and builds a relationship with the readers, while appealing to their shared experience. Another relevant linguistic feature is the engagement marker expressing an aside: this device interrupts the ongoing discourse, allowing the writer to provide a metacomment on what has been said.
The central preoccupation of book review writers, then, appears to be the effort to “strike a balance between assessing a novel and engaging with the audience” (p. 131).

Compared to the first part, the second part of the book, entitled “Dynamic dialogic interactions”, comprises contributions that are thematically more varied. At the same time, the three papers in this section enrich the book’s initial conception of ‘written specialized genres’ as (predominantly) different forms of academic discourse by reaching out to include several types of online media, namely traveller forums, tourist information websites and online blogs that all capitalize on the benefits that the online environment affords them.

In her analysis of online traveller forums on TripAdvisor, Francisca Suau-Jiménez characterizes this web-based cyber-genre as serving the needs of a virtual community of users that range from persuasion to evaluation and peer-to-peer solidarity. Tracing the participants’ dialogic interactions across conversational threads, Suau-Jiménez focuses on how stance and engagement voices are used in order to negotiate meaning and understanding. Qualitative analysis reveals a range of writer-oriented voice markers (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention markers) and reader-oriented voice markers (pronouns, imperatives, obligation modals, appeals to shared knowledge).

A different kind of identity construction is considered in the article by Rosana Dolón, namely that of child consumers. This topic, which has been neglected in previous research, is addressed using data from traveller opinion forums found on official tourist information websites. The analysis of the semantic roles of the word *kids* in subject and object positions confirms the hypothesis that child consumers are not represented as direct addressees. Instead, the active agents are parents, who are portrayed as the mediators acting on behalf of their children. In this way, the interaction is characterized as a form of intrusion in the parent-child relationship: the marketers and other non-parent interactants construct acts of complicity with the advice-seeking parents, using specific syntactic constructions, pronominal references and other structures to achieve that goal.

The last research paper in the volume is contributed by Francisco Yus. He starts with the premise that online forms of specialized academic genres constitute a new environment that requires the adaptation of the traditional roles of authors, texts and readers in order to ensure that written academic communication is successful. Since the online environment favours multi-tasking, with texts being arranged in a non-linear and link-mediated fashion, the academic dialogue between authors and readers has been significantly affected, particularly in the case of texts that are native to the Net (i.e. texts originally written for the Net). The analysis of different types of online academic texts, classified as ‘reproduced’, ‘adapted’ and ‘native’ texts, shows some significant differences in common-ground markers,
qualifications, hedges, boosters and attitude markers. The findings indicate that readers of native online texts are more active and “follow sequences of link-mediated chunks of text and interpret them without the explicit support or guidance of their authors” (p. 207). By contrast, while authors of native online texts are aware of the loss of control, they use interpersonality markers in a demonstrably different way from reproduced and adapted texts.

Appended at the end, the volume also contains a conclusion by Philip Shaw. The brief summary reflects on the analytical chapters with the aim of teasing out the common threads in the individual contributions. The points of contact are mapped along seven dimensions of difference among texts: language choice, genre class/colony, interest, medium, genre, domain and professionalism. The identification of these elements appears particularly relevant in terms of a possible future research orientation: while many studies in the field of specialized and academic discourse do consider the role played by some of these dimensions together, they typically do not investigate the interplay of all of them in a systematic manner. Thus, we need to take into account the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the writers (‘language choice’, reflecting e.g. various academic traditions), the differences between similar functional texts (‘genre class/colony’, ‘genre’, ‘domain’), the disinterestedness expected from academic texts (vs. partisanship or ‘interest’, as found in promotional discourses that aim to persuade in ways that are beneficial to the text producer), the affordances of the various modalities in which texts can be produced and mediated (‘medium’), and the extent of the professional experience of the text producer (‘professionalism’).

Arguably, these macro-dimensions could provide the basis for an approach that will consider both the increasing complexity involved in the production of academic and other specialized texts and the micro-linguistic implications and manifestations of all these elements in actual texts. In this way, textual and discourse/genre analysis can be suitably complemented by an analysis of the broader social practices surrounding the production of specialized (e.g. academic) discourse (cf. Lillis & Curry 2010; Chovanec 2012; Bennett 2014). Some papers in this collection definitely offer new vistas along these lines (cf. the almost programmatic framework offered by Francisco Yus or the way voice directionality is elaborated by Giuliana Diani). Although some of the chapters in the volume seem to accumulate too many examples without discussing them in sufficient detail, the editors did a very good job ensuring a thematic and methodological consistency that is likely to contribute to the success of this volume.
References


