

○ **K. HYLAND AND G. DIANI (EDS.),
*ACADEMIC EVALUATION: REVIEW GENRES
IN UNIVERSITY SETTINGS***

(LONDON: PALGRAVE, 2009, PP. VII, 245)

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Academic Evaluation presents case studies on different types of review texts to show how linguistic and rhetorical forms used to realise evaluative language vary across different academic disciplines, cultural contexts and times. The findings are interesting and informative, and likely to stimulate further discussion among researchers.

In the introductory chapter, Hyland and Diani explain that review genres are not only concerned with presenting the review writers' academic judgements of importance, value, usefulness and truth but they also involve review writers' construction and negotiation of interpersonal relationships. The 12 chapters which illustrate these points are divided into four parts.

In Part I, Overview of Review Genres, which consists of four chapters, Giannoni looks at how judgements of academic value are realised in a range of review texts which were instrumental in the appraisal of four recent monographs shortlisted for the 2005 Book Prize awarded by the British Association of for Applied Linguistics to an 'outstanding book in the field'. Her study has shown how the distribution of positive and negative evaluations and their levels of directness differ according to types of review texts. Reporting on an examination of the citation records of 25 review articles that were published in 1993, Noguchi's chapter addresses the question of how science constructs knowledge. She classified review articles in the science field into four types, and suggests that those which identify issues – presenting phenomena and new technology – or theories – presenting a theory or a model to explain or classify the phenomena – are more influential in the construction of knowledge than review articles that describe the background to a field or discuss a particular research focus and its current status. In chapter 3, Thompson analyses a corpus containing chapters from 24 British theses from four different disciplines. His study suggests that a literature review in a PhD thesis is a distinct genre characterised by its unique move structure and also that some nouns such as 'evidence' and 'problem' are used differently across different disciplines. Basturkmen's chapter presents a study on blurbs collected from the ELT course books and examines the pervasiveness of the promotional role

that the blurb plays and the use of praise in such texts. She argues for the need for future research that investigates how the intended readership responds to the praise and to the promotional features of blurbs.

Part II, *Disciplinary Variation*, consists of three chapters. Diani's chapter presents a corpus based analysis of reporting verbs in book review articles across different disciplines of linguistics, history and economics. She shows how the type and frequency of reporting verbs is related to each sub-discipline. Tse and Hyland investigate the role of gender and discipline in the performance of an academic identity by examining the use of hedges, boosters, attitude markers and engagement markers in book reviews in the fields of philosophy and biology. Their findings suggest there are some gender differences in the use of evaluative devices. Groom investigates relationships between particular kinds of epistemological values pursued in the disciplines of history and literary criticisms, on one hand, and key words and grammatical patterns used to evaluate books in those disciplines, on the other hand.

Part III, *Cross-Linguistic Variation*, consists of three chapters. Sanz's chapter is concerned with a cross-cultural analysis of the degree of evaluativeness and the distribution of positive and negative evaluations in English and Spanish history book reviews. The differences, found in her questionnaire survey, are discussed in terms of a different conceptualisation of the genre in the two languages. Moreno and Suárez compare rhetorical moves and critical comments made in academic book reviews in English and Spanish. Their findings from e-mail interviews with informants suggest that the observed differences are related to the review writers' attitudes to providing positive and negative comments. Bondi's chapter addresses the question of how text reflects the values of disciplinary culture. She analyses verbs of reporting in book review articles in the discipline of history in English and Italian. Observed cultural differences included a preference for dialogic argument versus monologic argument in the English and Italian sub-corpora, respectively.

Part IV, *Diachronic Variation*, comprises two chapters. The chapter by Gea-Valor and Ros explores the evolution of the blurb genre and discusses how rhetorical structure and linguistic realizations of blurbs have been influenced by the diversification of the target audience and the dramatic growth experienced by the advertising and marketing industries in the last decades. In the final chapter, Shaw examines linguistic realisations of evaluations in economics book reviews. His detailed qualitative analysis has shown diachronic variations in the ratio of positive and negative evaluations but similarities in terms of grammatical categories used to produce evaluative acts across different times.

Since they draw our attention to a range of possible linguistic and discourse features, the 12 chapters are valuable for researchers who are interested in investigating contextual variations

in review genres. However, such researchers may have benefited even more from a more detailed discussion on how to define and conceptualise review genres. This would enable the establishment of a firm basis for collecting baseline data from different disciplinary and linguistic contexts for comparative purposes. Definitions of review texts offered in the book, on the one hand, and research findings offered by some of the chapters in the volume, on the other hand, seem to call for further discussion on how we should define review genres in a way in which will be culturally sensitive.

For example, Hyland and Diani (p.5) define review texts as both informative and evaluative, and as having evaluation as their central function. They also state that review texts construct relations of solidarity between the writer and reader and help structure a text in expected ways. Some of the chapters in the book, however, raise an interesting question as to whether these definitions are equally applicable across wider contexts including languages other than English. For example, Sanz's chapter shows that there are different opinions as to what count as book reviews in English and Spanish. Her findings which discuss feedback from informants include that book reviews in Spanish can be seen as purely informative rather than as both informative and evaluative. On the other hand, Moreno and Suárez suggest that Spanish book reviews tend to contain only positive comment, while Anglo-American book reviewers tend to place importance on balanced reviews containing both positive and negative comment.

The volume seems to be oriented towards English and some European languages and excludes reference to other, 'non-Western' contexts. However, inclusion of findings from other contexts might enlighten readers as to different conceptualisations of the core and interpersonal functions of review texts. For example, while Hyland and Diani state that book review writers construct relations of solidarity with the book author and with other readers, in some languages such as Japanese, negative politeness strategies may be adopted more saliently in review genres to reduce the face-threatening acts of giving criticism in reviewing others' books.

Another prominent feature of the volume is that most of the chapters are corpus driven, employing research tools such as keyword search and concordancer, and, for the most part, adopting quantitative research methods. Such quantitative research methods no doubt offer useful findings; for example, providing overall patterns of distributions of key words and grammatical patterns, and their contextual variations. However, it is sometimes not very clear how findings made available from such quantitative analyses are clearly related to the core functions of evaluation. Perhaps future collaboration among researchers could inform readers, especially those who are not familiar with corpus driven research, as to how

quantitative analyses should be meaningfully combined with contextual analyses and interpreted together with feedback from individual academics to make substantiated claims on the relations between evaluation and linguistic strategies.

Lastly, it would have been useful if readers had been given more information on the context in which this book came about. While it is stated that the edited volume represents ‘the outcome of a collaborative project by a group of authors’ (p.vii), it does not explicitly explain the aims of the joint project and the nature of the collaboration among the contributors. Such information would help readers to interpret the research findings represented in the volume. Nonetheless, the 12 chapters are valuable for researchers interested in a variety of fields, including discourse analysis, academic writing, intercultural communication, and second language writing. They also offer a valuable and stimulating contribution to ongoing discussion of academic review genres.