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Linguistic Insights

Studies in Language and Communication

Françoise Salager-Meyer &
Beverly A. Lewin (eds)

Crossed Words: Criticism in Scholarly Writing

Peter Lang

In order for science to advance, previous research findings must be reviewed and criticized. However, conveying criticism is particularly difficult for scientists who must, at the same time, try to maintain an impersonal stance. This co-edited collection of independent studies written by scholars from many different countries addresses the thorny issue of criticism in science through discourse analysis of written scientific texts.

The research reported in this volume deals with questions such as: 1) how criticism is conveyed by various linguistic communities, such as Serbian, French, Spanish, German and English; 2) how criticism is handled in various genres, with examples drawn from book reviews, referees' reports, research articles, editorials, and review/meta-analysis papers; 3) the extent to which criticism is influenced by academic discipline, with findings from linguistics, economics, biology, business, musicology, chemistry, literary research, medicine, and physics, and 4) the impact interpersonal considerations have on the linguistic realization of criticism.

The conclusions reached by these contributions have implications for both the academic world and society at large in the sense that a fuller understanding of how criticism is expressed will help in the education of future scholars and in the understanding of the social construction of knowledge.

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**Crossed Words:
Criticism in Scholarly Writing**



Linguistic Insights

Studies in Language and Communication

Edited by Maurizio Gotti,
University of Bergamo

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Françoise Salager-Meyer
Beverly A. Lewin

Introduction

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860)

From the time of ancient Greece till the fourth century approximately, beliefs about the possibility of reaching Truth were represented by two opposing theses: one extreme posited that Truth could be reached by observing reality and applying Reasoning (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Democritus), while the other postulated that Truth is unreachable and any statement could be equally true or false (e.g., Pyrrho). In the course of history, the great majority of philosophers, with a few exceptions, agreed that it was possible to reach Truth. Hume and Montaigne, for example, can be classified as moderate skeptics. Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and, of course, the philosophers of the Enlightenment, all agree that knowledge and Truth could be reached by applying Reason and through empirical observation.

More modern schools of thought – structuralism and deconstructivism (Karl Popper, for example) – stress that scientific knowledge and Truth are relative, thus presupposing that *criticism* – hence refutability – is an essential component of scientific progress. Indeed, for scientific thought in any discipline to survive, it is necessary that it undergo continual discussion and revision, and this, because science, “refutation”, “argumentation”, “counter-argumentation”, “hypothesis formulation”, “doubt”, “disagreement”, and, above all, “criticism” are inextricably intertwined. “Science is a construct of arguments and counterarguments that we try to fit together in a mental puzzle,” affirm Vanderbroucke/de Craen (2001: 511). Indeed, and this is valid for any discipline – humanities and science alike – if scholars did not

have any criteria other than their own subjective opinions and experience, their claims could not be rejected or accepted. In other words, scholars are dependent on other scholars, and this close dependency is fundamental to the advancement of knowledge.

The previously mentioned theses on how to reach Truth clearly show that the pragmatic phenomenon of academic controversy is not new at all. As a further example, we cite Sir Dominic Corrigan (1802-1880), an Irish physician who, in 1852, expressed the importance of academic disagreement in the quest for Truth in the following terms:

Whether my observations and opinions be disproved or supported, I shall be equally satisfied. Truth is the prize aimed for: and, in the contest, there is at least this consolation, that all competitors may share equally the good attained. (Cited in O'Brien 1980: 1356)

This quote clearly shows that in science, truth should be the primary value, and truthfulness the core evaluation. But this logical dictum was not always accepted. One of the most famous examples of early scientific controversy is illustrated by the long delay in the publication of Newton's *Opticks*, a book, which, according to Halliday/Martin (1993), constitutes the birth of scientific English. As a matter of fact, Newton finished writing his book in the late 1670's, but it was only in 1704 that it was actually published. This delay was due to the controversy that surrounded Newton's article "A new theory of light and colours" that was published in 1672 in *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*. Newton did not succeed in convincing the scientific community of the time of the soundness of his arguments, but he was so convinced that he was right that he expressed them in another fashion, and the book eventually saw light a few years later.

However, in spite of such examples, it is the advent of post-classical modernity that constitutes a fundamental milestone in the advancement of science, which is now based on observation, experimentation, rationality and refutability and where criticism is considered as an ideal.

Indeed, the interpersonal phenomenon known in the literature as "academic conflict", "professional disagreement", "conflicting know-

ledge claims” or “negational reference” is – and has always been – a central issue in the world of scholarship (at least in Western academia) because scholars have always referred to previously published texts in order to discuss scientific knowledge, present their claims and/or uphold their standpoints against others. In a nutshell, knowledge fields advance through the modification of existing and accepted research. There are at least three processes through which this takes place: 1) new knowledge units are added to existing knowledge, 2) existing units are altered, for example, by complementing accepted research, and 3) existing “facts” are replaced or rejected. These processes represent different degrees of academic conflict (Dahl/Fløttum, this volume) and correspond to an epistemology that views scientific progress as an incremental process whereby new publications generally correct and integrate established knowledge (Kuhn 1970).

It should be abundantly clear by now that criticism or academic conflict is essential to the pursuit of knowledge, both in humanities and in science. This is why this socio-pragmatic phenomenon has recently attracted the attention of sociologists of science, historians, linguists and applied linguists (especially those interested in scientific discourse) who have examined it from various perspectives: quantitative, diachronic, cross-generic, cross-disciplinary, and/or cross-cultural/linguistic. However, this leads to a paradox. How can the expression of criticism be reconciled with the search for knowledge? The *ideal* of research is objectivity and detachment; criticism presupposes intrusion of the ego of the critic and possible conflicts with his self-interest, at least in a small community of scholars, where critic and target may know each other.

The content of the book

The chapters in this volume set out to answer how criticism is actually enacted in various genres, disciplines, language cultures and periods. It is also interesting that this problem engages scholars from diverse

cultures and languages, as represented by our contributors. The first problem is analyzing criticism, at least that aspect that constitutes *negative* evaluation. However, what is an objective way to recognize negative evaluation, which often can be implicit, indirect or dependent on the context? FEDERICO NAVARRO has taken the innovative step of developing negative evaluation as a pragmatic unit, providing a systemic account of lexical and grammatical resources organised in terms of discursive strategies which help activate an illocutionary force of (negative) evaluation: field, role, context, lexis, modality, comparison and quantification.

Perhaps our belief that academic research is imbued with detachment and objectivity has arisen because the main focus of study has been on research articles. Therefore, the four chapters that study genres in which negative criticism is acceptable should be especially enlightening. DAVIDE SIMONE GIANNONI explores the deliberate use of impolite wordings in editorials in medical journals. The results suggest that impoliteness tends to target the Out-group, enlisting strategies of ridicule and scorn. In contrast, in dealing with the In-group, editors are careful to avoid offence, even for serious misconduct. In another genre in which criticism is tolerated, ESMAT BABAI scrutinizes how negative evaluation is handled in book reviews. However, the discipline studied, physics, is normally considered to be a paragon of 'exact' science, one in which subjective elements do not trespass. Nevertheless, her analysis of a corpus of book reviews published in three leading physics journals reveals a tension between the tendency for open, direct confrontation, and the academic requirement of being detached, uninvolved and disinterested. The findings cast doubt on the uniformity of scholarly discourse and call for a genre-specific, context-dependent treatment of this concept. The investigation of published critical genres, such as editorials and book reviews, leads to questions about the genre of referee review, where the critic is expected, even obligated, to include negative evaluation but, unlike in the previously mentioned genres, may hide behind the mask of anonymity. However, as DIMITRA KOUTSANTONI explains in her rare look at reviews of rejected grant proposals, although reviewers are anonymous, they know the applicant(s)' name(s). Factors such as the applicants' reputation, track record, perceived ability to deliver the

research programme, school of thought and any personal and professional rivalries can affect the reviewers' evaluation (Travis/Collins, 1991; Langfeldt, 2001). This can create asymmetrical power relations. Rhetorical strategies such as personal reference, hedging and complimenting are all manipulated to balance these power struggles; they assist reviewers with showing deference to colleagues' expertise and creating a sense of in-group solidarity while at the same time playing a gate-keeping function and ensuring high standards of research and fair allocation of resources. SEYYED-ABDOLHAMID MIRHOSSEINI questions the acclaimed peer review process for journal research articles. He explores the process of submission, review, and rejection of an applied linguistics article. Highlighting the inconsistency among reviewers and among different rounds of the review process, he calls for a fundamental change in this system that would allow open author-reviewer negotiation.

The study of so-called literary criticism (i.e., literary research) indicates that the expression of criticism conforms more to the research genre than the critique genres. Finding little negative evaluation in literary research, BEVERLY LEWIN and HADARA PERPIGNAN suggest that, in literary research, the different methods of introducing one's own innovation may serve to highlight these achievements in ways other than 'knocking down the other fellow'. In fact, critics state their innovations without actually repudiating a position identified with any particular critic or group. Even innovations which are presented as replacements for existing theory are often offered without articulating a defect in previous critical positions. Such criticism as offered is always mitigated by hedging and discourse strategies such as balancing positive and negative evaluations, sharing responsibility for the deficiency, or excusing previous critics. This lack of negative evaluation may reflect the fact that what is important in the field of literary research is its contribution to an ongoing discussion. Instead of competing theories presented in scientific research, literary research can incorporate an infinite number of new positions and critical perspectives.

The differences in the above genres are confirmed by the only cross-genre study in this book. FRANÇOISE SALAGER-MEYER and MARÍA ÁNGELES ALCARAZ ARIZA show that when discipline is held constant, accepted conventions differ across genres. Their results lead

to a division of genres according to the frequency, type, and target of criticism: 1) a highly critical group made up of book reviews and letters to the editor; 2) a moderately critical group composed of editorials and review articles, and 3) the least critical group, made up of research papers and case reports. The above mentioned genre classification is explained in terms of the communicative function of each genre, the first two groups being researcher-centered, highly subjective, argumentative and evaluative in nature – thus presupposing a certain degree of interpersonal conflict –, whereas the latter is research-centered, narrative, descriptive and “factual” with a pretension to objectivity.

The above studies (with the exception of Navarro) are based on texts produced by Anglophone authors. The question then arises if the tendency to criticize or the method of its manifestation is not an artifact of Anglophone culture rather than a ‘given’ in scholarly writing. Two papers turn to this aspect. Using texts written in the same language, English, ZOFIA GOLEBIEWSKI examines scholarly criticism from two cultural perspectives: native language and discourse community. She analyzes sociology papers written in an Anglophone discourse community by native speakers of English and by a native speaker of Polish, comparing these to one written by a native speaker of Polish and produced in the Polish academic sociological discourse community. In addition to indicating these differences, she contributes a useful tool for revealing critical attitudes; instead of evaluative lexis or speech acts, criticism can be realized by judicious use of adversative concessive conjunctions.

Similarly to Golebiowski, ANA I. MORENO and LORENA SUÁREZ are concerned with the difficulties faced by writers from non-Anglophone cultures in handling a sensitive interpersonal issue such as criticism. They suggest that part of the answer might be related to differing cross-cultural notions of *good face*, partly reflected in the ways and the extent to which writers typically intrude into their texts by means of their visibility and invisibility strategies. They compare the actual practices followed by writers from Anglophone and Castilian Spanish cultures to express critical comments in the same genre (book reviews) and the same discipline (literature). The results show that reviewers from these two writing cultures differ greatly in their preferences for reaffirming or suppressing their personal identity when

expressing critical comments on a book under review. This indicates that the notion of *good face* is culturally determined in this respect.

Just as genre and cultural background influence the expression of criticism, so does the discipline under study. TRINE DAHL and KJERSTI FLØTTUM investigate whether the difference in nature between linguistics (leaning towards the humanities) and economics (leaning towards science) has an impact on how criticism of other research – and researchers – is realized in the introduction section of research articles from the two disciplines. Their investigation reveals examples of outright rejection of existing knowledge, notably in the linguistics corpus. In addition, criticism in both disciplines is more personal and less hedged than might be expected from previous studies as well as from general notions of politeness and deference in academic communication. Importantly, the instances of criticism in this corpus are very often used to highlight the writer's own contribution rather than the shortcomings of other researchers.

The complementary rhetorical acts of highlighting one's own contribution and downplaying the research of others often occur in the move Swales (1990) terms 'establishing a niche'. PHUONG DZUNG PHO, SIMON MUSGRAVE and JULIE BRADSHAW observe how 'niches' are created in two disciplines, applied linguistics and educational technology, in introductions to research articles. The results of the study show disciplinary differences; writers in the field of applied linguistics tend to build on existing research, whereas those in educational technology are more likely to establish a niche by claiming the originality of their study. They suggest that the way in which writers establish a niche is partly shaped by the history of the discipline; in a long-established discipline such as applied linguistics the extensive body of existing research informs the research design, and frames the niche. In a newly-established discipline such as educational technology, there is more virgin territory with greater possibilities for originality, and challenges to the research that has been done can be more tentative.

The remaining perspective in this volume is diachronic. How has the expression of criticism evolved historically? One example is provided by BOJANA PETRIC, who traces the path of scholarly criticism in Serbian book reviews during a period of 100 years, by means of samples from three intervals: 1900-9, 1950-9 and 2000-9. The in-

novation in this study is that the findings are discussed with reference to the relevant socio-cultural developments affecting the Serbian academic community during different periods. For instance, book reviewers in the 1900's are found to be more critical when reviewing books by foreign authors compared to fellow Serbians. The most striking findings include a sharp decrease in the number of critical book reviews and in the frequencies of criticism over time. While in the first two periods, the majority of critical remarks are direct, in the third period, the first decade of the 21st century, criticism is mostly mitigated, showing a tendency for reviewers to avoid personal criticism.

In the second diachronic study, OLIVIA FONG-WA HA reports on criticism in a discipline ignored by previous research: music. She traces the evolution of music criticism in record reviews from a leading UK music journal, with samples obtained at four ten-year intervals between 1921 and 1995. The results indicate that over time, record reviews have become less informative and more evaluative and praise and criticism more specific. The standard of performance is the main focus of both praise and criticism, with an increasing trend observed over the years. Critics generally favor praise over criticism; the former tends to be direct and unmitigated, whereas the latter includes strategies to mitigate possible friction between reviewers and the people involved in record production.

As editors, we must be self-critical. We acknowledge that firm conclusions or generalizations cannot be drawn. These articles are self-selected, and only two or three are presented on any given variable of criticism – genre, history, discipline or culture. Moreover, many of the studies are based on very small samples, fewer than ten texts. The two studies on referee criticism are based on reviews of rejected submissions and do not purport to show trends in *accepted* submissions. However, in spite of the above limitations, all these studies, one way or another, bring new light to this crucial aspect of scientific writing, without which, as we said before, old ideas would not be abandoned and brand new ones would not be adopted. In other words, the 13 chapters of this volume bring new insight on the way our knowledge of the world in science and humanities is constructed. As Sir Karl Popper wrote in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*: “The wrong view of science betrays itself in the craving to be right; for it is not his

possession of knowledge, of irrefutable truth, that makes the man of science, but his persistent and recklessly *critical* quest for truth.”

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Method of Analysis

The Critical Act as a Pragmatic Unit for Studying Academic Conflict. A Methodological Framework¹

1. Introduction

Evaluation, in particular negative evaluation, is a major component of academic discourse but an evasive sociodiscursive phenomenon. Recent research (e.g., Moreno/Suárez 2008) studies evaluation in terms of *critical acts* as these pragmatic units are useful to quantify and compare evaluative tendencies among different texts and contexts. In addition, a pragmatic approach is essential to identify indirect, context-dependent evaluation.

However, critical acts are generally identified intuitively and non-systematically, their general dynamic is often not explicitly explained, functions and forms are sometimes confused, and a predictive evaluative system is not usually provided.

In this chapter, I aim at providing a systemic account of negative evaluative lexical and grammatical resources organised in terms of discursive strategies. Drawing from systemic-functional linguistics and pragmatics, I claim that discursive strategies are efficient ways of achieving the goal of (negative) critical acts: to evaluate something as negative. I study a sample of 30 randomly selected Spanish academic book reviews published in the early 1940s in the *Revista de Filología Hispánica*, probably the first internationally influential linguistic journal in Latin America.

1 The present study is part of a research project financed by the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBACyT F116) entitled ‘La historia del Instituto de Filología de la Universidad de Buenos Aires. Un enfoque estratégico-discursivo’ and directed by S. Martín Menéndez.

2. Negative evaluation and the academic book review genre

Evaluation expresses the writer's opinion and constructs dialectically the value system of that person and his/her community (Martin/White 2005: 92; Thompson/Hunston 1999: 6). It is thus a major component of language and helps account for the relation between linguistic structure and social practice (Linde 1997: 152).

It has been extensively pointed out that evaluation plays a key role in academic discourse (see Valle 1999). Researchers have to continually appraise their own contribution, evaluating the contributions of their colleagues at the same time (Gunnarsson 2001: 116; Hunston 1993: 58). In particular, *academic conflict* (Salager-Meyer 2000: 371), associated with negative evaluation, is an interpersonal pragmatic feature central to the world of scholarship which shows interesting intercultural and historical variability in its manifestations (Salager-Meyer/Zambrano 2001: 166). In addition, negative evaluation threatens the addressee's face (Brown/Levinson 1987) and puts the addresser's own face under risk. This is the reason negative evaluation is often implicit and indirect (Becher 2001: 137), posing a particular challenge to discourse analysis.

The academic book review as a genre (Bakhtin 1986; Martin 1984) pursues a general goal which cuts across its different (recent) sociohistorical configurations: to describe and evaluate new publications which are relevant for a certain scientific community (Motta-Roth 1998: 33). Despite being a rarely cited genre, the review has a fundamental function establishing the position of the reviewed author and book in the social construction of agreed academic knowledge (Hyland 2004: 43). Negative evaluation is a necessary discursive element to achieve this purpose. Therefore, it is an expected, central feature of the academic book review (Salager-Meyer *et al.* 2007: 1760).²

2 In fact, I have found that negative evaluation is a necessary stage in 20th century Argentinean academic book reviews in the field of linguistics and literary studies (Navarro 2011).

3. Critical acts

Critical or *evaluative acts* have become common pragmatic units for the study of evaluation in the academic book review (e.g., Alcaraz Ariza/Salager-Meyer 2005: 31; Moreno/Suárez 2008: 17)³ as they show several methodological advantages. They have to be analysed qualitatively on their own but can be quantified afterwards, which allows all kinds of contrastive studies. In addition, they are speech acts (Austin 1962) which carry out positive or negative evaluations through an evaluative illocutionary force that co-occurs with typical sets of lexical and grammatical resources. I will argue that these lexicogrammatical resources help *activate*, together with other cotextual and contextual factors, an evaluative illocutionary force. Therefore, critical acts can be studied through multistrata analysis, merging graphemic, lexicogrammatical, discursive and sociohistorical insights. This pragmatic approach is essential as evaluation, in particular negative evaluation, is often indirect and context-dependent.

Although definitions are sometimes vague, I believe Moreno and Suárez's definition (e.g., 2008: 18) is an appropriate starting point. They claim that a critical act is a pragmatic unit making "positive or negative remarks on a given aspect or sub-aspect of the book under review in relation to a criterion of evaluation". This definition is broad enough so as to include both positive and negative evaluations. It actually operates with the simple *good/bad* pair, which is an acceptable way of dealing with the methodological challenge of multiple evaluative values. In addition, this definition focuses on the (changing) evaluated aspect as a compass to determine the speech act scope. This is the reason critical acts are flexible units which may be limited to clauses or extend through whole paragraphs. Furthermore, the specific criteria of evaluation (e.g., methodology, writing style, image quality, book price) allow us to establish inter- and intradisciplinary contrasts.

Nevertheless, present-day studies do not usually offer a preestablished, systemic set of evaluation resources. That is to say,

3 Alcaraz Ariza and Salager-Meyer study medical reviews, whereas Moreno and Suárez study literary reviews.

critical acts are generally identified intuitively and non-systematically, their general dynamic is often not explicitly explained, functions and forms are sometimes confused and a predictive system of resources is not usually provided. In general, these analyses are refined through three kinds of procedures: 1) expert members of the scientific community are asked to intuitively confirm the analyses (e.g., Salager-Meyer *et al.* 2003); 2) several linguists go through the same corpus and then the interrater reliability is calculated (e.g., Salager-Meyer *et al.* 2007: 1763); 3) a selection of evaluative manifestations are thoroughly explained in their own terms, without reference to a wider set of evaluative strategies and resources (e.g., Gunnarsson 2001; Moreno/Suárez 2008).

I believe that these methodological procedures are useful, but insufficient. It is necessary to develop a systemic account of evaluation in terms of discursive strategies and lexicogrammatical resources that can be identified on the text surface. This background system can help support qualitative analysis and predict to a certain extent quantitative analysis.

Recent theories have made important progress along this line (e.g., Hunston/Sinclair 1999; Martin/White 2005). However, critical acts, in particular when it comes to negative evaluation, still pose a considerable challenge. They are not necessarily activated through negative evaluative lexis but through a variable set of co-occurring, usually indirect evaluative resources. Indirect evaluation is based on complex pragmatic inferences triggered by the cotext and context of the critical act. It is, therefore, a must to integrate a systemic approach with a pragmatic approach.

Critical acts aim at evaluating something as *positive* or *negative*, although in this chapter I will focus on negative evaluation. Drawing from systemic-functional linguistics (e.g., Halliday/Matthiessen 2004) and pragmatics (e.g., Grice 1975), I claim that this communicative goal is understood inferentially and is textually realised in a sociohistorically specific set of lexical and grammatical resources organised in terms of discursive strategies (see Menéndez 2000). Writers follow discursive strategies as efficient ways of achieving goals. These strategies organise sets of lexicogrammatical resources which realise those goals textually. As for (negative) critical

acts, the analysis should identify lexical and grammatical resources, belonging to umbrella strategies, which help activate the illocutionary force of (negative) evaluation, that is, the critical act's goal.

4. Corpus and methodology

In this chapter, I study a sample of 30 randomly selected Spanish academic book reviews published in the early 1940s in the *Revista de Filología Hispánica*, the first internationally influential journal dedicated to linguistics and literary studies (i.e., philology) in Latin America (Navarro 2006). This 36,169-word long corpus⁴ is part of a wider corpus, which ranges up to the end of the 20th-century and allows contrastive historical analysis (Navarro 2011).⁵

I qualitatively looked for negative critical acts in the corpus. Regular lexicogrammatical resources were identified and organised systematically in terms of discursive strategies. This exploratory set of evaluative strategies and resources was then used to search the corpus again. The results were interesting as the set of resources helped predict the appearance of critical acts formerly not clearly identified. Afterwards, strategies were reorganised and refined, and the corpus was searched again. I eventually reached a total of 445 negative critical acts (one every 81 words) and a set of seven negative evaluative discursive strategies comprising multiple lexicogrammatical resources. This system of negative evaluative strategies and resources is explored in detail below.

4 A list of texts used is available. Please write to <fnavarro@ungs.edu.ar>.

5 I seek to analyze the discourse of a highly influential institution dedicated to language and literature research, the Instituto de Filología Hispánica of Buenos Aires (1923–present day), throughout the study of its journals. Only after 1939 did the Instituto periodically publish such journals. The *Revista de Filología Hispánica* was published from 1939 to 1946. Thus, the corpus used in this chapter accounts for the first period in the history of the institution's periodic journals.

5. System of negative evaluative strategies and resources

5.1. *Field*

Field strategy embraces an open system of lexicogrammatical resources that interacts with knowledge shared within each scientific discipline or subdiscipline. This disciplinary appraisal includes assumptions about what is considered in general positive or negative for a certain community of researchers. It is sociohistorically variable and can be determined only to a certain extent. Furthermore, the lexicogrammatical resources involved here are probably the least systematic and predictive of the whole negative evaluative system as they range from proper names to complete clauses. However, its influence over the way evaluation and, in particular, (negative) critical acts work is profound, as several researchers have pointed out (e.g., Martin 1999: 161-162; Shaw 2004: 138).

To fully understand this strategy, it is essential to do research on the sociohistorical background of the scientific community under study. My corpus reflects the common disciplinary appraisal of the group of philology researchers based in the Instituto de Filología of Buenos Aires during the 1940s. It is obvious that researchers within the Instituto did not share a homogeneous view of their field of expertise. However, several critical acts cannot be explained without reference to a particular disciplinary appraisal.

I claim that there are three different scopes for this disciplinary appraisal. First, general assumptions about scientifically acceptable or unacceptable procedures. Secondly, assumptions within a particular scientific discipline or subdiscipline regarding authors, bibliography, hypotheses, methods, skills, events in the history of the discipline and editing choices. Thirdly, assumptions shared by a small group of scientists based in a specific institution. These different scopes are only guidelines and it is not possible to draw a clear demarcation line among them. Nevertheless, I believe that different writers and communities may tend to refer to assumptions with a higher or lower level of generality.

In my corpus, the most common practice is to refer to specific assumptions that could not have been shared or understood by scientists not belonging to the field of philology. Resources often include references to names of researchers and events in the history of the discipline, as can be seen in this example:

- (1) A la crítica del darwinismo está dedicado el capítulo final de esta exposición histórica, después de *algunas ligeras noticias sobre el influjo ejercido por el descubrimiento del sánscrito y sobre las teorías de W. Humboldt, Max Müller y Whitney* (1939: 77) [emphasis mine].
[The last chapter of this historical account is dedicated to criticising Darwinism, after a few passing comments on the influence of the discovery of Sanskrit and on the theories of W. Humboldt, Max Müller and Whitney.]

In example (1) the reviewer quantifies the scope and depth of the book – “*algunas ligeras noticias*” (“a few passing comments”) – dedicated to the influence of the discovery of Sanskrit and the theories of Humboldt, Müller and Whitney in the history of the study of language. The extract can only be considered a critical act if we take into account that the discovery of Sanskrit was an outstanding event in the history of linguistics and, in particular, that this was early acknowledged by the discipline. In addition, researchers at the Instituto in the 1940s recognised 19th-century German philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt as a key, influential figure. These positions shared within a (small) field of expertise activate a negative evaluation of the reviewed book: a historical account of the study of language simply cannot include a few passing comments on these authors and events considered *important* by the community. Therefore, example (1) is to be interpreted as a critical act.

5.2. Role

Role strategy embraces a group of lexicogrammatical resources which interact with shared knowledge about the particular genre where the evaluation takes place. In particular, assumptions about the position of the writer/reviewer, on the one hand, and the author/reviewee, on the other, within the academic book review as a genre. These two

discursive positions are given certain validations and limitations that are relevant to understand indirect negative evaluation.

5.2.1. Reviewer

As previously mentioned, the academic book review is an evaluation of the latest published research within the field and, therefore, it should include critical acts. This genre-specific expectation helps activate the illocutionary evaluative force of a critical act. In particular, the reviewer expresses the discursive position of someone who is validated and even expected to criticise.

I have identified a system of verbal processes that, when directly or indirectly⁶ expressed by the reviewer, can inferentially activate an illocutionary force of negative evaluation. The processes can be sorted into the following groups:

The first group includes mental perceptive and cognitive processes (Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 208-210) with a negative mood adjunct. Whereas *perceptive* verbs are “descubrir” (“discover”), “encontrar” (“find”), “hallar” (“detect”), “advertir” (“notice”), “observar” (“examine”), “ver” (“see”) and “apreciar” (“appreciate”), *cognitive* verbs are “comprender” (“comprehend”), “entender” (“understand”), “distinguir” (“distinguish”), “diferenciar” (“differentiate”) and “determinar” (“determine”).

I believe that the inferential process is as follows. Mental processes like “ver” or “entender” are necessary for the description and evaluation the academic book review provides. The negation in the interpersonal plane (through negative mood adjuncts) of these ideational processes might trigger a negative evaluation.⁷ That is to say, a negative aspect of the reviewed book or author does not allow the reviewer to do his/her expected task. In short, there are the following key assumptions:

6 Sometimes impersonal forms are preferred, probably because they help mitigate the effects of the negative evaluative remark: passive voice, first person plural subject or the attribution of the process to an impersonal role as in “el texto” (“the text”).

7 It is worth pointing out that negation implies a dialogic contrast; therefore it might carry negative evaluation (Labov 1997; Shaw 2004: 127).

- i) The reviewer is able to evaluate the reviewed book and author.
- ii) The reviewer is expected to evaluate the reviewed book and author.
- iii) The evaluation includes the examination (perceptive processes) and the study (cognitive processes) of the reviewed book and author.

These assumptions lead to some of the following inferences:

- If the reviewer does not do (iii), it is not because he is incapable – see (i) – or not expected – see (ii) – to do so.
- Therefore, it is possible that the reviewed book or author does not let the reviewer do so.
- Therefore, it is possible that the reviewer is indirectly pointing out that the reviewed book or author is flawed.
- Therefore, it is possible that the reviewer is realising a critical act.

Let us consider the following example:

- (2) En la lista de obras bibliográficas *no vemos* citadas las siguientes, conocidas y manejadas, sin género de duda, por la autora: Barrantes, V., *La imprenta en Extremadura*, en *Narraciones extremeñas*, 2ª parte [Madrid, 1873], p. 1-104; Martínez Añibarro, M. *Intento de un diccionario biográfico y bibliográfico de autores de la provincia de Burgos*, Madrid, 1889; Riaño de la Iglesia, P., *Los impresores: Reseña histórica de la imprenta en Cádiz*, RABM, 1915, XXXIII, 320-49 (1939: 74) [emphasis mine].
[In the list of references we do not see the following sources, though they are, without a shadow of a doubt, well-known and used by the author: Barrantes, V., La imprenta en Extremadura, in Narraciones extremeñas, 2nd part [Madrid, 1873], p. 1-104; Martínez Añibarro, M. Intento de un diccionario biográfico y bibliográfico de autores de la provincia de Burgos, Madrid, 1889; Riaño de la Iglesia, P., Los impresores: Reseña histórica de la imprenta en Cádiz, RABM, 1915, XXXIII, 320-349.]

The first person plural, referring to the reviewer and the potential readers, is the senser of the process “ver” (“see”), which takes a negative polarity in the interpersonal plane. The phenomenon not seen by the reviewer is the target of the negative evaluation. The reviewer cannot accomplish the process of examining the references of the

book because they are missing. Thus this is a clear critical act. In addition, there are some hedges that downtone the negative evaluation: the book lacks the references but they are “conocidas y manejadas, sin género de duda, por la autora” (“without a shadow of a doubt, well-known and used by the author”). This positive evaluative remark saves the author's face to a certain extent and balances the attack.

As with the rest of strategies and resources, these verbs do not automatically activate a negative evaluation. It is common to find mental perceptive processes, together with a negative mood adjunct, that take a phenomenon evaluated negatively, as in “we don't see problems”. The set of resources mentioned have to be studied together with other textual and contextual elements, in particular with other negative evaluative resources.

The second group includes mental *emotive* processes (Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 208-10) realised in verbs like “desear” (“wish”), “esperar” (“expect”), “echar de menos” (“expect to see”), “gustar” (“like”), “lamentar” (“regret”) and “sorprenderse” (“be surprised”). This group doesn't normally show a negative mood adjunct because the working assumptions are different, although consistent with the previous ones – especially (i) and (ii):

- iv) A positive emotive state of the reviewer corresponds to a positive evaluation and a negative emotive state of the reviewer corresponds to a negative evaluation.

These assumptions lead to the following inference:

- If the reviewer describes a negative emotive state, it is possible that he/she is realising a critical act.

This can be seen in the following example:

- (3) Por último, *echamos de menos* un índice general, o “Table of contents”, que guiara para la consulta de las distintas secciones en que se divide el tomo (1939: 74) [emphasis mine].
[Finally, we expect to see a *general index*, or “Table of contents”, that would help in consulting the different sections into which the volume is divided.]

In example (3), the process of expecting something that does not exist in the book (“echamos de menos”), expressed by the reviewer and the potential reader in the first person plural, is understood as an unsatisfactory mental state. This is, therefore, reinterpreted as corresponding with a negative indirect evaluation of the phenomenon: the missing table of contents.

The third group includes material *transformative* processes (Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 184) that basically mean *modifying* and *adding*. They are realised in verbs like “corregir” (“mend”), “agregar” (“add”), “aportar” (“contribute”), “proponer” (“propose”), “anotar” (“note”) and “introducir” (“introduce”). The assumption at work here is:

- v) A book that does not need changes is evaluated positively and a book that does need changes is evaluated negatively.

That assumption leads to the following inferences:

- If the reviewer suggests changes, it is possible he/she is indirectly pointing out that the reviewed book or author is defective.
- Therefore, it is possible that he/she is realising a critical act.⁸

The fourth group includes *existential* processes (Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 256) through which it is stated that something is either *missing* or *unnecessary*. The existential processes do not take the reviewer as inherent role (i.e., existent) but an element of the book. The verbs may be evaluative on their own and directly point out that the element lacked should exist in the book: “faltar” (“be missing”); or that the extra element is unnecessary: “sobrar” (“be spare”). Therefore, such verbs carry a deontic value as they express the writer attitude in terms of necessity (see footnote 10 for *modality*).

Let us consider an example:

- (4) En la edición presente *falta*, por desgracia, la acentuación. (1942: 181) [emphasis mine].
[Regrettably, accent marks are missing in the current edition.]

8 See verb “anotar” in example (6) below.

In this example, the existential verb “falta” (“are missing”) is evaluative on its own and directly points out that the element missing, “la acentuación”, should exist in the book. This deontic modalization of some missing element of the book counts as a critical act. Thus, “falta” gathers together three evaluative strategies: role (existential process), modality (deontic modality) and evaluative lexis (negative evaluative verb). In addition, negative evaluative adverb “por desgracia” (“regrettably”) directly activates the evaluative illocutionary force.

Although not as frequent as “faltar” and “sobrar”, the negative form of some *non-evaluative* verbs can be reinterpreted as a negative evaluation of the missing or extra element. Examples of the negative form of intransitive “figurar” (“feature”) and “aparecer” (“appear”) and transitive “presentar” (“show”) can be found in the corpus. In these cases, the missing element is inferentially evaluated as necessary or the extra element as unnecessary. The inferential process includes assumptions (i) and (ii) and the violation of Grice's maxim of relevance: it is irrelevant to describe what does *not* exist in the review book unless the description is to be reinterpreted as an evaluation. So the inferences at work are:

- If the reviewer claims something is non-existent, it is possible he/she is indirectly pointing out that the reviewed book or author is flawed.
- Therefore, it is possible that he/she is realising a critical act.

5.2.2. Reviewee

The basic general social function of the academic book review assigns the reviewee with a distinctive discursive position: he/she has to be (relational processes), think (mental processes), say (verbal processes) and do (material processes) certain things to a certain extent to be evaluated positively. This assumption entails that when it is mentioned that the reviewee is *not* or does *not* think, say or do something, it can count as a negative critical act. We can formulate the assumption as follows:

- vi) The reviewee must be, think, say and do certain relevant features to a certain extent to be evaluated positively.

That assumption leads to the following inference:

- If the reviewer questions that the reviewee is, thinks, says or does something, it is possible that the reviewer is realising a critical act.

Let us consider the following example:

- (5) Por ejemplo el § 5 sobre *-ado*, *-ada*. El autor cita la explicación de Grandgent, pero parece *desconocer* la tesis del señor Carl S. R. Collin (*RFH* 1941: 393) [emphasis mine].
[For example, chapter 5 on -ado, -ada. The author quotes Grandgent's explanation, but seems not to know Mr. Carl S. R. Collin's thesis.]

Example (5) shows a variety of strategies and resources that activate the negative critical act. First, the phrase “for example” links anaphorically (see *cotext* below) this fragment with a previous metadiscursive negative critical act where it is stated that the book shows “terribles lagunas en el conocimiento de lo que se ha hecho en el campo mismo de la especialidad del autor” (“extreme gaps of knowledge in what has been done within the author’s own field of expertise”). Following this very same position, in example (5) it is said that the author “desconoce” (“does not know”), mitigated with the modal verb “parece” (“seems”), Carl S. R. Collin’s thesis about the Portuguese suffixes *-ado* and *-ada*. It is certainly not needed to confirm if Collin’s thesis was at that time an expected quotation, although this information collaborates with the negative critical act (see *field* above). If it is a genre-related assumption that the reviewee must express some relational, mental, verbal and material processes, a negative lexicalised form of a mental cognitive process verb (“know”), plus a (probably) positive evaluative phenomenon (Collin’s thesis), counts as a critical act.

5.3. Cotext

Cotext strategy links anaphorically or cataphorically the critical act’s textual area to other evaluative areas of the text. In this way, a cohesive evaluative chain helps express the evaluative value of

different textual areas. This strategy is realised through three types of resources: rhetorical structure, metadiscourse and connectives.

5.3.1. *Rhetorical structure*

The rhetorical structure of the genre may help activate a critical act depending on its sociohistorically specific features. It is relevant to consider both the shared knowledge about the *stages* (Martin 1985) or the *moves and steps* (Swales 1990) of a given genre structure and how these stages are realised in an actual, dynamic genre sample. For instance, I have shown that the academic book review as found in mid-twentieth century Argentinean philology is organised sequentially as follows: 1. *introduction*, 2. *description*, 3. *negative evaluation* and 4. *conclusion* (Navarro 2006). The unusual stage 3 is a gathering of all negative critical acts in one specific functional space of the review. We can therefore interpret a textual piece as a critical act if it is located between 2. *description* and 4. *conclusion*. This helps activate a critical act in genres where negative evaluation has crystallised as a stage on its own.

Resources include orthographic means, such as paragraph change, and different lexicogrammatical features normally associated with the adjacent stages or moves. These resources are usually articulated with metadiscursive (negative) critical acts, as we explore below.

5.3.2. *Metadiscourse*

Metadiscourse consists of expressions used by the writer to organise the propositional contents of a text and, therefore, to establish relations with the reader (Hyland 2005). In particular, evaluation is organised and modified through metadiscursive means. Frequently, some critical acts, strategically positioned at the beginning of a negative evaluative stage of the review, project their negative illocutionary force to nearby textual areas. This projection is usually cataphoric, as in the following example, although it can also work anaphorically:

- (6) En un librito tan excelente como éste, merece la pena anotar *las siguientes correcciones del texto*: (1942: 183) [emphasis mine].
 [In such an excellent little book, it is worth noting the following corrections to the text:]

This clause starts a new paragraph after a 659-word introduction and description of the reviewed book. Throughout the introduction/description, there is not a single negative critical act. The paragraph, nonetheless, starts a strictly negative evaluative area of the review. First, it anaphorically evaluates the previous description as positive (“un librito tan excelente como éste”, with positive adjective “excelente”), mitigating, at the same time, the negative evaluation to come. Afterwards, it modalizes as *desired* (“merece la pena”) the verb “anotar” (“note”) and the negative evaluative nominal phrase it modifies: “las siguientes correcciones del texto” (“the following corrections to the text”). In this case, the phrase works as a negative evaluative label (see below) centred around the negative evaluative noun “correcciones”. This is followed by a colon, a typical orthographic resource to project metadiscursive indications cataphorically. As can be seen, metadiscursive critical acts typically work as borderline flags of the negative evaluative stage of the academic book review. This is their main metadiscursive goal.

After a metadiscursive critical act like this one, it is clear that what follows has to be evaluated as negative as well. In this case, this critical act is followed by an impressive 725-word list of 35 critical acts.

In addition, the transformative process realised in verb “anotar” leads to an inferential critical illocutionary force: the suggested change points out that the reviewed book is defective.

Metadiscursive critical acts typically use orthographic means (colon, hyphens, parenthesis, paragraph change) to clarify their scope and orientation (i.e., anaphoric or cataphoric). In addition, they usually include evaluative labels (Francis 1998) to classify and evaluate the aspect covered.

5.3.3. Connectives

Connectives help link a critical act with other evaluative areas of the academic book review, building evaluative bridges between one critical act and another. Once again, the discursive strategy activates positive and negative evaluation through evaluative force emerging from the cotext.