

## Evaluation in anglophone and Czech academic book reviews. A case study

Jana Kozubíková Šandová

Department of English Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Czech Republic  
sandova@ff.jcu.cz

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### 1 Introduction

Evaluation is an integral part of all academic review genres, whose function is to assess the quality of research and work written by other academics. These genres include, for example, book reviews, review articles, book review articles, book blurbs, or literature reviews (Hyland – Diani, 2009, p. 1). Even though important, review genres have been somewhat neglected in the Applied Linguistics literature. Nevertheless, academic review genres play an important role in academia because of being “crucial sites of engagement where writers argue their viewpoints, signal their allegiances and display their credibility” (Hyland – Diani, 2009, p. 1). Furthermore, academic review genres serve as a “discussion forum in which new contributions to a particular discipline are evaluated by experts and professional writers” (Gea Valor, 2000, p. 9). Thus, they are more interactive than other academic genres since review articles are tightly connected with specific texts and their authors. In other words, “[...] the book review reflects, in an exceptionally clear manner, the functioning of the interaction between its participants: the reviewer and the reviewee” (Gea Valor, 2000, pp. 9–10). We can therefore say that this interpersonal relationship between the reviewer and the reviewee is decisive for the formation of this genre as a whole. While authors usually avoid critical comments in research articles, book reviews are explicitly evaluative. This is connected with a possible conflict between the author of the reviewed book and the reviewer, who may be an academic colleague. Criticism represents a potentially face-threatening act, therefore, it is frequently combined with praise to maintain solidarity with the book author.

As Gea Valor (2000) points out, the book review article involves information, description, and evaluation. It introduces new studies in a particular discipline and in this way it provides information about how these publications may be beneficial to the progress of a given field. The reviewer describes the structure and content of the book and evaluates it from different points of view, such as “adequate treatment of the subject, usefulness for the prospective reader and possible future applications” (Gea Valor – del Saz Rubio, 2000–2001, p. 166). This function of the book review may be called *ideational*, in case we apply Halliday’s (1994) functional approach to language. It is related to the other function, *interpersonal*, dealing with “the complex interpersonal relationships involved in disseminating information and views” (Etaywe, 2017, p. 24) and with an attempt of reviewers to achieve a balance between positive and negative evaluative acts.

The evaluation of positive and negative aspects of the book under review is a key characteristic of the book review article; however, it is presented merely as a discussion to engage in a dialogue with the author of the reviewed book and other experts in the field, as

Hyland – Diani (2009) point out. Such a debate “allows the reviewer to create a ‘research space’ for his or her own views, exploiting the reviewed authors’ reported opinions to construct a ‘niche’ for his or her claims on the topic” (Hyland – Diani, 2009, p. 3).

A typical characteristic of book reviews is that they are valuable sources of novelties and progress in the given field, as mentioned above. However, the employment of critical comments in book review articles is not conventionalised. It depends not only on the text of the review itself but also on other factors exceeding it, such as the linguistic context and the disciplinary community of the reviewer, or their position in relation to the disciplinary community of the reviewee. Hence, when attempting to explain rhetorical strategies used by reviewers, it is important to take into account both linguistic and cultural context of the review. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore whether reviewers of one and the same disciplinary community but of different linguistic and cultural contexts adopt identical rhetorical strategies to convey evaluation. For this purpose, Czech and Anglophone Linguistics book review articles are analysed with the aim to explore how positive and negative critical comments are distributed across the particular rhetorical moves and with what frequency they occur. A possible variation in the distribution of evaluative acts seems to be connected with the language culture. A comprehensive study of the genre of the book review article may contribute not only to a more fine-grained definition of its communicative purpose but also to determine “to what extent it mirrors the interpersonal relationship established between its communicative participants” (Gea Valor, 2000, p. 11–12).

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 explicates the concept of evaluation and how it is understood in academic discourse. Also, it focuses on its linguistic and grammatical realisation. At the end of this section, a brief delimitation of critical comments is offered. Section 3 describes material under analysis and introduces the theoretical framework together with methodology employed in this study. Section 4 discusses the results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The discussion is supported by a number of illustrative examples from both sub-corpora. Conclusions are drawn in the final section of the paper.

## 2 Evaluation in academic discourse

Evaluation is a complex term commonly used when referring to language expressing opinion and attitude, covering a range of not only linguistic but also textual phenomena. Yet what may pose a problem is, firstly, the plethora of designations denoting it and, secondly, disagreement among scholars about how to identify and delimit evaluation in text. The terminology employed in the literature to denote evaluation is, for instance, *evidentiality* (Chafe – Nichols, 1986), *affect* (Besnier, 1990), *attitude* (Halliday, 1994), *stance* (Conrad – Biber, 2000), *appraisal* (Martin – White, 2005), and *metadiscourse* (Hyland – Tse, 2004). Even though these terms may have a different focus and are not entirely synonymous, they all emphasise the perspective adopted by Stubbs that “whenever speakers (or writers) say anything, they encode their attitude towards it” (Stubbs, 1996, p. 197), i.e. they relate to the perspective of the language user.

The topic of *evaluation* has a long tradition in linguistics. Hunston and Thompson define it as “the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values” (Hunston – Thompson, 2000, p. 5). At the same time, they are conscious of the elusiveness of the concept and explain that it is sometimes utilised “in a more restricted sense in analysing lexical expressions of the speaker or writer’s emotional attitude” (2000, p. 5). This narrower viewpoint is then very close to Martin – White’s (2005) theory of appraisal. Nevertheless,

Hunston – Thompson’s preference for using the term *evaluation* is on grounds of its user-orientation and because it enables to “talk about the *values* ascribed to the entities and propositions which are *evaluated*” (2000, p. 5, italics in original).

As Hyland – Diani (2009, p. 5) maintain, evaluation involves speaker assessment of both value-indicating statements and epistemic/evidential statements. The former are close to opinions along a “good-bad axis” (the so-called *affective opinion*), the latter are associated with “judgements of probability” (i.e. *epistemic opinion*). Hyland – Diani regard these two types of opinion as subcategories of evaluation for the reason that both of them share similar structural means of expression. In this connection, Conrad – Biber (2000, p. 57) speak of *stance*, which is divided into *epistemic stance*, indicating the degree of certainty and trustworthiness of a statement, together with the source of information, *attitudinal stance*, indicating speaker’s (or writer’s) feelings and value judgements, and, finally, *style stance*, relating to the way the information is presented. Epistemic stance corresponds to the above-mentioned epistemic/evidential statements and also roughly to what Halliday terms *modalization*, which relates to probability. Instead of using the term epistemic stance, Thompson – Hunston (2000, p. 20) utilise the designation *modal evaluation* and state that it usually relates to propositions. Attitudinal stance correlates with value-indicating comments and also roughly with the concept of *appraisal* defined by Martin – White (2005). It has been termed *affective evaluation* by Thompson – Hunston (2000, p. 20) and tends to be connected with entities.

Evaluation in review genres is invariably associated with judgemental criteria. When a reviewer assesses a book, they compare it with what is regarded as standard within a particular academic community. “These norms are constructed from the community’s bodies of knowledge and epistemic understandings, what counts as appropriate methodologies, relevant literature, robust theories and effective practices” (Hyland – Diani, 2009, p. 7). These standards and values of an academic community enable writers “to position themselves and their work in relation to other members of their groups, negotiating and confirming their membership of particular communities” (Hyland – Diani, 2009, p. 7).

Evaluation in academic discourse fulfils three main functions, which are not mutually exclusive. The central function of evaluation is expressing the writer’s opinion of something associated with reflecting and constructing the value-system of the evaluator and their discourse community. In this connection, Hunston – Thompson correctly point out that “identifying what the writer thinks reveals the ideology of the society that has produced the text” (2000, p. 6). The second function of evaluation is establishing and maintaining a relationship between the reviewer and the reader. This relationship may be of different nature, namely manipulation, hedging, and politeness (cf. Hoey, 1983; Carter – Nash, 1990; Hunston – Thompson, 2000). From these concepts, especially hedging has been thoroughly studied in academic discourse (see e.g. Myers, 1989; Crompton, 1997; Hyland, 1998; Kozubíková Šandová, 2017a, 2017b, i. a.). The third function of evaluation is connected with organising the discourse, i.e. the writer does not only convey opinions and values but they also structure the text in usual ways. Sinclair (1987) points out that evaluation appears at specific places in discourse, usually at boundaries of text units, for instance towards the end of a paragraph.

According to Hunston – Thompson (2000), evaluation may be identified conceptually and linguistically. The conceptual identification of evaluation is connected with “signals of comparison, subjectivity, and social value” (2000, p. 13). In case of comparison, evaluation “consists of anything which is compared to or contrasts with the norm” (2000, p. 13). Subjectivity is associated with the expression of speaker’s assessment or attitude. Finally, the

value-laden nature of evaluation may be defined, as Hunston (1985) argues, with respect to goal-achievement. Generally, something evaluated as good “helps to achieve a goal, while something that is bad prevents or hinders the achievement of a goal” (Hunston – Thompson, 2000, p. 14).

Linguistically, Hunston – Thompson determine three defining features of evaluation: lexis, grammar, and text (2000, p. 14ff.). There are lexical items in language whose primary function is evaluative, for instance, adjectives such as *lovely*, *gorgeous*, *horrible*, adverbs like *unfortunately*, *incredibly*, *interestingly*, nouns such as *genius*, *idiot*, *loser*, or verbs, for example, *win*, *lose*, *succeed*. Some expressions gain evaluative meanings only in specific contexts. In this connection, Martin (2000) discusses the difference between *inscribed appraisal*, i.e. explicitly expressed, and *evoked appraisal*, i.e. appraisal conveying evaluation “based on what is conventionally valued” (Hyland – Diani, 2009, p. 6). Regarding inscribed appraisal, it is not that common in review genres. Reviewers do not always express themselves explicitly, especially when they convey a negative attitude. Criticism may pose a challenge to the writer whose book is under review. Implicit evaluation occurs in review genres more frequently since writers very often look for linguistic means weakening criticism and express themselves more indirectly.

Apart from being expressed lexically, evaluation may be expressed grammatically (the second defining feature of evaluation) in that it is incorporated in the grammatical structure of a sentence, such as *there is not much evidence to claim that*. One of the earliest approaches focusing on the relationship of grammar and evaluative language is Labov’s analysis of the narrative. When discussing deviations from the basic narrative syntax, Labov (1972, p. 378) points to the fact that these departures “have a marked evaluative force” and divides them into four major groups: *intensifiers* (e.g. gestures, quantifiers, repetition), *comparators* (e.g. negatives, modals, quasimodals, questions, comparatives, superlatives), *correlatives* (e.g. progressives, double appositives, attributives), and *explicatives* (clauses introduced by conjunctions such as *since*, *because*, or *while*) (for a more detailed description of these linguistic means see Labov, 1972, p. 378ff.).

Stubbs (1986, p. 1) proposes to study language expressing personal attitudes and opinions, agreement and disagreement, making social allegiances, remaining vague, etc. Stubbs summarises all these phenomena under the concept of *modal grammar*. Nevertheless, we may also speak of aspects of evaluation since Stubbs includes, for instance, expressions indicating the source of propositions, vague expressions, expressions indicating explicitness, logical connectors, modal meanings of the so-called private verbs, i.e. verbs expressing intellectual states, attitudes, or thoughts.

Focusing briefly on the third defining feature of evaluation, which is text, Hunston – Thompson state (2000, p. 19) that evaluation can usually be traced all through a text, not being limited to one particular part of the text. This may be supported by my research since linguistic means of evaluation are present throughout all parts of book review articles, with a higher occurrence in some specific sections.

As we can see from the description above, Thompson – Hunston’s conception of evaluation is very broad covering various lexical, grammatical, and textual patterns, which express attitudinal, communicative (or pragmatic), and discourse-organising functions. Thompson – Hunston see the main advantage of understanding evaluation conceptually in that “it does not restrict what can be counted as evaluation” (2000, p. 14), but at the same time they confess the disadvantage of the conceptual approach, which is the fact that “the argument for what constitutes evaluation becomes circular” (2000, p. 14).

## 2.1 Critical comments

Focusing now on critical comments, previously researched e.g. by Hyland (2000), Carvalho (2001), Giannoni (2006), Moreno – Suárez (2008a, 2008b, 2009), they may be defined as “positive or negative appreciations of a given aspect or sub-aspect of the book under review. They are identified, interpreted and measured in a way that takes the co-text and the rhetorical context into account, irrespective of their lexico-grammatical realisation” (Moreno – Suárez, 2008c, p. 1). A positive appreciation may be defined “as an act which attributes credit to another for some characteristic, attribute, skill, etc., which is positively valued by the writer” (Hyland, 2000, p. 44). A negative appreciation is, on the contrary, an act demonstrating a different attitude or opinion of the book author and the reviewer.

Both positive and negative evaluative acts are integral parts of a quality book review. Readers expect these types to be present in the review since these evaluative acts may provide them with helpful guidelines for forming an opinion about the quality of the reviewed book. However, as already briefly mentioned in the introduction, negative critical comments may be understood as face-threatening acts potentially leading to interpersonal tension between the author of the book and the reviewer. An important question of the reviewer may then be how many critical comments should occur in the review in order to be critical enough. As Moreno – Suárez (2009, p. 162) point out, the type and amount of critical comments are contingent, for instance, on these factors: “the quality of each book, its intended purpose, audience and argument, the interest that the reviewer feels, the reviewer’s academic background, and so on.” From this it follows that there are always more factors at play influencing the amount of evaluative acts in the reviews.

## 3 Corpus compilation and methodology

The corpus compiled for the purpose of this case study comprises altogether 40 Linguistics book review articles, 20 reviews are written in English by Anglophone scholars and 20 reviews are written in Czech by Czech academics. All reviews were published in prestigious linguistic journals (*Applied Linguistics*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *International Journal of English Studies*, *Journal of Linguistics Časopis pro moderní filologii*, and *Slovo a slovesnost*). All reviews are single-authored, referring to exactly one book (a monograph), and written by different reviewers.

Regarding the Anglophone sub-corpus, it is composed of reviews written solely by British English native speakers since it is not possible to consider the culture in different English speaking countries to be one homogenous cultural community. In addition, evaluation is culture-specific and therefore, there are differences in the way it is expressed, by native speakers of, for instance, British and American English. As for the differences based on gender, age, or the professional experience of the writers, these were not taken into consideration in the analysis because it was beyond the scope of the present study to focus also on these features. However, they could be the subject of a future, more detailed investigation.

Both Anglophone and Czech reviews were published between 2015 and 2018. The whole corpus reaches the extent of 80,237 words. The Anglophone sub-corpus contains 40,176 running words, the Czech sub-corpus totals 40,061 running words. This almost identical size of both sub-corpora makes them well comparable. Even though the extent of the whole corpus is rather small, in my opinion, it is sufficient for the purpose of this case study. As pointed out by Flowerdew (2004, p. 18), smaller and more specialized corpora are more appropriate for performing a more fine-grained and contextually-informed analysis than general corpora.

Since the present study investigates rhetorical strategies expressing evaluation used by reviewers of two different writing traditions and cultural contexts, both quantitative and qualitative analysis of evaluative acts in both sub-corpora was explored. All reviews were analysed manually to detect critical comments, which were then tagged as positive or negative. It is important to emphasise that not only a single expression but also a phrase or a short stretch of text may express positive or negative appreciation. Thus, each evaluative act was identified as a functional unit, regardless of its lexico-grammatical structure. Linguistic means expressing either positive or negative evaluation are varied, including evaluative adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives assessing the quality of various aspects of the book under review are, for example, *detailed*, *substantial*, *thought-provoking*, *unique*, *excellent*, or *ground-breaking* in English, *zajímavý* [interesting], *vynikající* [outstanding], *pečlivý* [careful], *cenný* [valuable], or *výjimečný* [exceptional] in Czech. Reviewers also use superlative adjectives referring to the quality of the reviewed book (e.g. *the most interesting*, *the best*, *the clearest*, *největší* [the largest], *nejrozsáhlejší* [the most extensive], *nejucelenější* [the most comprehensive]). Other language means point to the degree to which that particular quality occurs. These means are realised by adverbs such as *fully*, *immensely*, *extremely*, *very*, *particularly*, *slightly*, *velmi/velice* [very], *trochu* [to some extent], or *nesmírně* [immensely].

A common attribute of rhetorical moves is various attitude markers co-occurring with critical comments. They belong to the most personal evaluative expressions and may be found in the final parts of the review. These attitude markers are realised by the first person singular or plural cognitive verbs such as *I/we believe*, *I/we think*.

Evaluative comments were identified in particular rhetorical moves of the reviews, therefore, a modified version of Motta-Roth's (1995) classification of rhetorical sub-functions was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Her taxonomy consists of four moves and their sub-functions. Even though typically evaluative are Move 3 (*Highlighting parts of the book*) and Move 4 (*Providing closing evaluation of the book*), evaluative acts may also occur in Move 1 (*Introducing the book*) and Move 2 (*Outlining the book*), which belong primarily to descriptive moves. The original sub-functions of Move 4 (*Definitely recommending/disqualifying the book* and *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings*) defined by Motta-Roth were adapted in order to differentiate between the categories of *evaluation* and *recommendation* more clearly. The latter category thus constitutes a separate move (for a schematic description see Figure 1 below).

**Move 1 Introducing the book**

Sub-function 1 Defining the general topic of the book	and / or
Sub-function 2 Informing about potential readership	and / or
Sub-function 3 Informing about the author	and / or
Sub-function 4 Making topic generalizations	and / or
Sub-function 5 Inserting book in the field	

**Move 2 Outlining the book**

Sub-function 6 Providing general view of the organization of the book	and / or
Sub-function 7 Stating the topic of each chapter	and / or
Sub-function 8 Citing extra-textual material	

**Move 3 Highlighting parts of the book**

Sub-function 9 Providing focused evaluation	
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**Move 4 Closing evaluation**

Sub-function 10 Completely positive evaluation	or
Sub-function 11 Positive evaluation with aspects to improve	or

Sub-function 12 Completely negative evaluation

**Move 5 Recommendation**

Sub-function 13 Definitely recommending the book or

Sub-function 14 Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings or

Sub-function 15 Not recommending the book

**Figure 1 A modified version of Motta-Roth's taxonomy of rhetorical sub-functions in book reviews**

Move 1 is introductory and focuses on a brief description of the book under review, on informing about potential readership and about the author (sub-functions 1-3). In the next sub-function, *Making topic generalisations*, the reviewed book is related to disciplinary knowledge. The last sub-function within Move 1 places the book under review in the context of previously published books in a particular discipline. Move 2 consists of three sub-functions connected with outlining the book. At first, the reviewer explains how the book is organised, then they describe the topics of individual chapters, and finally, additional material such as tables, graphs, or illustrations, is mentioned. Move 3 is the first truly evaluative move. It has only one sub-function highlighting positive and negative aspects of particular chapters or parts of the book under review. Finally, Move 4 provides closing evaluation of the reviewed book as a whole.

As already mentioned above, Motta-Roth's taxonomy identifies two sub-functions within Move 4. However, at this point the taxonomy had to be modified because we understand *evaluation* and *recommendation* as two separate rhetorical functions. Hence, they cannot belong under one joint category. When the reviewer evaluates a book, they highlight its positive and negative aspects. When the reviewer recommends a book, they encourage the reader to buy it, borrow or read it, etc., in short, to act somehow. For this reason, Move 4 (*Evaluation*) in my taxonomy consists of three sub-functions, namely *Completely positive evaluation* (sub-function 10), *Positive evaluation with aspects to improve* (sub-function 11), and *Completely negative evaluation* (sub-function 12). Move 5 (*Recommendation*) also consists of three sub-functions: *Definitely recommending the book* (sub-function 13), which is a direct recommendation of the book, *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings* (sub-function 14), in which the reviewer recommends the book but at the same time, they highlight certain negative aspects, and *Not recommending the book* (sub-function 15), which is, as the name suggests, a downright rejection of the book.

Finally, it must be emphasised that not all of the moves and sub-functions described here are a compulsory part of the book review article. On the contrary, it happens very frequently that some sub-functions are missing, especially in Move 1. Sometimes Move 5 is missing as well.

**4 Results and discussion**

In this section of the paper, we will analyse the distribution of evaluative comments occurring in particular rhetorical moves of the book review articles. The aim is to find out whether reviewers of one disciplinary community but of different linguistic and cultural contexts employ the same rhetorical strategies to communicate evaluation. In other words, we will focus on any cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variation in rhetorical strategies of Anglophone and Czech reviewers conveying evaluation. The occurrence of evaluative acts in both sub-corpora is summarised in Table 1<sup>1</sup> below.

<sup>1</sup> M1 refers to Move 1, M2 refers to M2, etc. BRs means book reviews, and CCs refers to critical comments.

		M1, SF1	M1, SF2	M2, SF6	M2, SF7	M3, SF9	M4, SF10	M4, SF11	M5, SF13	M5, SF14	TOTAL
English BRs	positive CCs	33	0	8	19	127	116	0	1	0	<b>304</b>
	negative CCs	1	0	1	0	79	0	34	0	0	<b>115</b>
Czech BRs	positive CCs	46	0	1	0	139	162	0	1	0	<b>349</b>
	negative CCs	2	1	0	0	161	0	59	0	1	<b>224</b>

**Table 1** The occurrence of critical comments (CCs) in English and Czech book review articles (BRs)

The results of the critical comments analysis suggest that both groups of reviewers make the reviews evaluative to a similar degree (particular differences will be discussed below). Positive evaluations outnumber the negative ones in both corpora, as apparent from the figures in Table 1. This is connected with the aim of reviewers to express affinity with authors of the books under review and not to threaten authors' reputation. However, as Hyland – Diani (2009, p. 8–9) correctly point out, “not only can criticisms undermine a hearer's ‘positive face’, the desire to be approved of, but compliments also carry risks, for not everyone is entitled to compliment and conveying praise implies an authority to appraise and make public one's judgements”, which means that both praise and criticism should be strategies carefully employed in review genres. What may also be found in both corpora is a tendency to make positive comments not only in central moves of the review but also in Move 1, but the majority of negative comments occur in central moves and are connected with criticising specific aspects of the book, not the book as a whole. Therefore, the course of evaluation is generally not much different in both academic cultures.

The critical comments analysis has also revealed that the move with the highest frequency of occurrence of evaluative acts is Move 3 in both corpora, followed by Move 4. This fact points to the tendency to place the majority of evaluative comments in central moves or towards the end of the reviews. As already mentioned in the previous paragraph, critical comments may also be found in Move 1, even though with a much lower frequency compared to Moves 3 and 4. The lowest number of both positive and negative evaluations appears in Move 2, again in both corpora. This distribution of critical comments is logical and quite predictable since in opening moves the reviewers introduce the book briefly and add general evaluative comments, which are in the overwhelming majority positive. Then, in Move 2, reviewers focus solely on the description of the organisation of the book and its parts, any inclusion of critical comments is very scarce. The most relevant place for offering praise or criticism is thus Moves 3 and 4, which bring the review to the end. Move 5 is sometimes omitted from the review but when present, it may consist of a short recommendation of the book under review; however, it mostly does not contain any explicit evaluative comments.

Regarding cross-cultural variation, an interesting intercultural difference may be noticed in the occurrence of critical comments in Move 2, sub-function 7 (*Stating the topic of each chapter*). In the Anglophone sub-corpus 19 positive comments occur, whereas not a single critical comment with this sub-function appears in the Czech sub-corpus. Czech reviewers probably focus on presenting the content of each chapter matter-of-factly excluding any evaluation, while Anglophone reviewers sometimes include critical comments also in



this section in order to anticipate the quality of the book or for the reader to take a positive view of the assessed book.

The results nevertheless indicate that overall, Czech reviewers employ more evaluative acts compared to their Anglophone counterparts. In the Czech sub-corpus 573 critical comments occur altogether, while in the Anglophone sub-corpus 419 critical comments were found. Regarding positive comments, the difference between both corpora is not that striking (348 positive comments in Czech reviews vs. 304 positive comments in Anglophone reviews); however, focusing on negative critical comments we can see that Czech reviewers tend to be more negative in their evaluation than Anglophone reviewers (224 : 115). The explanation of this finding is not that straightforward if we consider a certain degree of subjectivity reviewers bring into their assessments, even though they strive for objective evaluation of the book. Czech reviewers may have aimed at offering a balanced attitude towards the assessment of the books, which was applied especially in Move 3, as apparent from Table 1. Anglophone reviewers focus more on highlighting positive features of the book, negative aspects are not that frequent and mentioned only when providing focused evaluation.

### 5 Evaluative acts in particular moves

Focusing now on the distribution of critical comments in particular moves, their occurrence in Move 1 (*Introducing the book*) indicates the tendency of both groups of reviewers to start the review with positive evaluations, negative evaluations occur only scarcely. This serves as motivation for the recipient to continue reading the whole review and to gain a positive attitude to the book under review. Critical comments in Move 1 occur only when reviewers describe the general topic of the book (sub-function 1), in the Czech sub-corpus also when informing about potential readership (sub-function 2). Several examples of positive comments excerpted from both sub-corpora occurring in Move 1 follow:

(1) *This volume offers a **fresh** approach to the study of intercultural communication [...].* [ER8]

(2) *This is one more reason why the present collection, edited by Jonathan Webster, is **particularly important and valuable**.* [ER11]

(3) *Nová monografie Libuše Duškové, první dámy a doyenky d'age pražské univerzitní jazykovědné anglistiky, patří k **prominentním** titulům [...]. [...(it) belongs to prominent titles]*[CR8]

(4) *[...] představuje vydání této knihy **poměrně důležitou** [particularly important] událost vzhledem k tomu, že takto **podrobný a aktuální** popis [a thorough and topical (description)] mluvnické stavby portugalského na českém trhu citelně chybí.* [CR2]

The only negative comment occurring in Move 1 in the Anglophone sub-corpus is the following:

(5) *[...], **the volume varies substantially in terms of quality, content and writing style and may have benefitted from greater editorial involvement**.* [ER12]

In the Czech sub-corpus, two negative critical comments were found in Move 1, here is one of them:

(6) *Jednou z jejích hlavních slabin je **absence originálního přístupu** při probírání konkrétních problémů.* [One of its main weaknesses is the absence of an original approach][CR13]

As we can see, evaluation is expressed lexically, mostly by evaluative adjectives (e.g. *fresh*, *valuable*, *comprehensive*, *prominentní* [prominent], *podrobný* [comprehensive], *aktuální* [topical]), which may be emphasised by evaluative adverbs (e.g. *particularly*,

*mimořádně* [extraordinarily]). Nouns are sometimes used in evaluative environment, e.g. *důležitost* [importance], *šíře* [width], expressing positive evaluation, or *slabina* [weakness], *absence* [absence, lack], which express negative evaluation. Negative critical comment in (5) is expressed grammatically by employing the modal verb *may* functioning pragmatically as a hedge to soften criticism and weaken negative evaluation.

Regarding the frequency of occurrence, Move 2 (*Outlining the book*) contains the lowest amount of critical comments in both sub-corpora. Here we can notice a cross-cultural difference since in the Czech sub-corpus a mere one incidence of a critical comment appears, compared to 28 instances found in the Anglophone sub-corpus. Czech reviewers focus solely on outlining the structure of the reviewed book in this move, whereas Anglophone reviewers make their evaluations also in this section (sub-functions 6 and 7). Critical comments made here are up to one all positive. To illustrate, consider Examples (7) – (9) below. As apparent, (7) and (8) contain positive evaluations emphasising the value of the research and the most useful attitude to treating phonological segments, respectively. Example (9) shows an instance of a negative and positive comment in one sentence. Sometimes, criticism precedes praise, in other cases it follows praise. The situation when both types of critical comments are present in one and the same sentence is not uncommon in both sub-corpora.

(7) *The chapters in the volume address these issues in several respects and thus contribute **substantially** to research that does not limit itself to formal aspects of coherence at the level of language surface [...]. [ER17]*

(8) *Chapter 6 presents perhaps **the most positive** appraisal of segments in the first section of this volume, [...]. [ER9]*

(9) *The book is organised into four parts [...]. **While this organisation at times seems arbitrary as many of the themes overlap, it does provide coherence and is useful for prospective readers [...]. [ER2]***

The only critical comment present in Move 2 in the Czech sub-corpus is this one below:

(10) *Kniha je přehledně strukturována. [clearly (structured)] [CR12]*

Concerning linguistic means signalling evaluation in Move 2, they are both lexical and grammatical. Lexical items employed in this move are again evaluative adjectives and adverbs (e.g. *accessible, useful, intriguing, convincing, substantially, nicely, richly, přehledně* [clearly], etc.), and evaluative nouns (e.g. *strength, interest, importance*). Grammatically, evaluation is expressed by comparative adjectives and adverbs (*clearer, more significantly*), and by the superlative adjectives (*the most positive, the best*).

The highest number of critical comments occurs in Move 3 (*Highlighting parts of the book*) in both sub-corpora, which is not surprising since this move, together with Move 4, belong to the most evaluative ones, as already mentioned above. Nevertheless, interesting cross-cultural differences may be observed in Move 3. One difference relates to the incidence of positive and negative comments in this move. Anglophone reviewers show a more positive attitude when providing focused evaluation than their Czech counterparts, who adopt a more negative stance. Thus, positive comments outnumber negative comments in Move 3 in the Anglophone sub-corpus (127 positive evaluations vs 79 negative evaluations), while in the Czech sub-corpus negative comments prevail (161 negative vs 139 positive evaluations). This prevalence of positive critical comments in the Anglophone sub-corpus indicates a higher degree of responsibility Anglophone reviewers take for their assertions in order to find enough support for their claims than in case of negative comments. This effort mirrors the competitive nature of Anglophone academic discourse community. Czech reviewers, in spite of being rather critical when it comes to evaluating specific parts of the book, tend to be more

positive when providing a closing evaluation. The reason is they attempt to avoid potential conflict with other members of a not so numerous Czech linguistic community.

The other variation observed in this move is connected with the ratio of positive to negative critical comments in both sub-corpora. From this perspective, the Czech sub-corpus appears to be a little more balanced than the Anglophone sub-corpus where a difference between positive and negative critical comments is higher. Even though both groups of reviewers may strive for a balanced review, Czech reviewers apply this “balance principle” more strictly. Several illustrative examples of critical comments occurring in Move 3 may be found below:

(11) *Each chapter is based on very extensive research and scholarship [...] and although easy to read, it is also densely packed with information and ideas, so that in addition to telling its readers a great deal about food, its history and role in cultural identity, it also persuasively tells them a great deal about the power of linguistics.* [ER16]

(12) *Zvláštní pozornost zaslouží* [special attention should be paid] *příspěvek sice krátký rozsahem [...], ale který je pozoruhodný* [remarkable] *už svým námětem a zásadní* [essential] *svým obsahem. Dušková v něm opět prokazuje svou schopnost brilantní analýzy* [(she) proves her ability to carry out a brilliant analysis] [...]. [CR8]

Examples (11) and (12) above contain positive critical comments, Examples (13) – (16) below contain negative evaluations. All these comments refer to the evaluation of specific parts of the book under review, most frequently to its particular chapters, not to the book as a whole, which is the main difference from Move 4, in which the whole book is assessed.

(13) *Disappointingly, the two remaining chapters in this section do not quite deliver the goods.* [ER19]

(14) [...], *percentages based on small raw numbers can be misleading*, [...]. *Buchstaller makes passing comments about small raw numbers for quotatives go and be like among older Tyneside English speakers in the 1990s, but overall this problem is not adequately addressed.* [ER18]

(15) *V kapitole o paralelních korpusech v systému Manatee/Bonito na s. 252 autor zcela pomíjí* [the author completely leaves out] *ihned se nabízející otázky, jak propojit (alignovat) paralelní texty [...].* [CR14]

(16) *Text je bohužel* [unfortunately] *zrovna v této zásadní kapitole mnohdy ne úplně přesný* [not exactly accurate], *přičemž některé podstatné informace chybějí.* [some essential information is missing] [CR16]

Linguistically, lexical means expressing evaluation in Move 3 are similar to those applied in the previous moves; however, they are much more varied. Reviewers use a wide array of evaluative adjectives such as *excellent*, *convincing*, *insightful*, *great*, *promising*, *thorough*, *disappointing*, *misleading*, *problematic*, *limited*, *překvapivý* [surprising], *pestrý* [diverse], *nepostradatelný* [indispensable], *bohatý* [rich], *důkladný* [thorough], *cenný* [valuable], *zavádějící* [misleading], *sporný* [questionable], *zastaralý* [outdated], etc. Furthermore, evaluative adverbs are used, for example *clearly*, *convincingly*, *richly*, *effectively*, *creatively*, *disappointingly*, *bohužel* [unfortunately], *komplexně* [comprehensively], *pregnantně* [precisely], etc. Nouns expressing positive or negative evaluation utilised in Move 3 are *shortcoming*, *weakness*, *problem*, *simplification*, *strength*, *erudition*, *zásluha* [merit], *přednost* [asset], *slabina* [weakness], *nedostatek* [drawback], etc. Verbs with either positive or negative evaluative function are *broaden*, *lack*, *překračovat* [exceed], *podarit se* [succeed], *zaujmout* [attract attention], *chybět* [lack].

Reviewers very often make use of boosters to emphasise a specific, in most cases positive, feature of the book they assess such as *particularly* (*important/powerful/relevant*),

*extremely (influential/interesting), fundamentally (different) naprosto (zásadní) [absolutely (fundamental)], mimořádně (důležitý) [extremely (important)], velice (vhodné) [very (suitable)], ryze (spekulativní) [purely (speculative)], etc. When reviewers aim at mitigating the force of their criticism, they utilise hedges, either lexical or grammatical (modal verbs): *slightly (disappointing), a somewhat (unnecessary discussion), lehce (problematický) [slightly (problematic)], do jisté míry (matoucí) [to some extent (misleading)], poněkud (odbylý) [rather (sloppy)], should be treated cautiously, can be misleading, one would have expected, readers might wonder, these would have merited systematic discussion, poměrně (nejasný) [rather (unclear)], pomohlo by [it would help], spíše bychom očekávali [we would rather expect], etc.**

Apart from modal verbs, other grammatical means used as evaluative expressions in Move 3 are comparative and superlative adjectives (e.g. *clearer, more accessible, the most satisfying, the most accessible, příhodnější [more convenient], problematictější [more problematic], největší [the biggest], nejrozsáhlejší [the most extensive], nejlepší [the best]*).

What is interesting in this move is the use of metaphors as another lexical means expressing evaluation. These metaphors express positive evaluation, such as *a forward-looking topic, a fresh approach, an illuminating way (of further exploring the linguistic outcome), his findings could be fruitfully complemented, and I found the whole thing to be a page-turner*.

Similarly to Move 3, Move 4 also comprises numerous evaluative acts, both positive and negative. These comments refer to the book as a whole and are placed at the end of the review. In both sub-corpora, positive comments prevail over negative ones dramatically. The reason is that both groups of reviewers tend to finish their reviews in a positive note and aim to stress the positive aspects of the book under review. Negative critical comments appear in both sub-corpora in Move 4 as well but with much lower incidence, compared to their frequency in Move 3. Below are examples illustrating critical comments found in Move 4.

(17) *In general, this volume raises a number of thought-provoking questions for the impoliteness researcher, regarding methodology, analysis, and theoretical implications.* [ER6]

(18) *In summary, the book represents a welcome contribution to the growing body of literature on grammaticalisation.* [ER10]

(19) *As is common with edited volumes with several contributors, there is no clear, unifying thread to follow throughout the book. Moreover, the logic underlying this volume's organisation is not very apparent, which adds to a sense of incongruity between sections [...].* [ER15]

(20) *Celkově lze konstatovat, že kniha Vývoj portugalského jazyka naplňuje veškeré cíle, [Overall, the book The development of the Portuguese language fulfills all the objectives] které si autor vytyčuje, [...].* [CR12]

(21) *Závěrem můžeme konstatovat, že třídílná gramatika portugalského jazyka Ivy Svobodové představuje dílo zdařilé a také velmi potřebné [Finally, we can state that the three-part grammar of the Portuguese language by Iva Svobodová represents a successful and very useful work] vzhledem k absenci podobného textu v České republice.* [CR2]

(22) [...] *a v těchto ohledech publikace zůstává pod svými možnostmi.* [beyond its capabilities] [CR13]

Regarding linguistic means expressing evaluation in Move 4, they are the same or very similar to those utilised in the previous moves, i.e. evaluative adjectives, evaluative adverbs, evaluative nouns and verbs, the modal verbs *may, might, can* used as hedges, comparative and superlative adjectives. In some cases, the force of evaluative adjectives, adverbs, and

verbs is either intensified by boosters or mitigated by hedges, a strategy employed by both groups of reviewers either to emphasise praise or weaken criticism. Metaphors are not that common, however, a very nice example of it is used in one of the Anglophone reviews:

(23) *With clinical clarity, they diagnose the sick state of the profession, and prescribe what may be an effective – though inescapably painful – cure.* [ER3]

Within Move 5, I identified two sub-functions, namely *Definitely recommending the book* (sub-function 13) and *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings* (sub-function 14). In both sub-corpora, an explicit recommendation occurs only in four book reviews altogether, in two Anglophone reviews and in two Czech reviews. Critical comments appear in three out of these four reviews. Examples (24) and (25) below illustrate sub-function 13, Example (26) demonstrates sub-function 14. Linguistic means of recommendation are not that rich compared to evaluative expressions employed in the previous moves. Positive evaluation is expressed by the adverbs *wholeheartedly* and *vřele* [heartily], which intensify the verb *to recommend*. Negative evaluation in Example (26) is indicated by the adjective *problematický* [problematic] and the noun phrase *značné rezervy* [major limitations]. In this example, the prepositional phrase *s nemalými výhradami* [with considerable reservations] co-occurring with the verb *to recommend* functions as a mitigating device to weaken the force of the criticism.

(24) *So I recommend it wholeheartedly to the readership of this journal.* [ER16]

(25) *Práce zaplňuje prostor synchronní lingvistické komparatistiky velmi účinně a lingvisticky zajímavě. Je bezesporu přínosná v mnoha ohledech [...]. Lze ji proto vřele doporučit* [We may thus heartily recommend it] *každému vážnému zájemci o tuto jazykovou oblast a problematiku.* [CR3]

(26) *Kniha Soni Schneiderové však – jak jsem se snažil ukázat – vykazuje množství problematických aspektů* [a number of problematic aspects], *a v zaplňování onoho prázdného místa má proto značné rezervy* [major limitations], *doporučit ji tedy lze jen s nemalými výhradami.* [CR13]

## 6 Conclusion

Evaluative acts are an inseparable part of any book review article. Their occurrence throughout the text varies depending on discipline and academic writing tradition. This paper has focused on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of rhetorical strategies of Anglophone and Czech reviewers employed in Linguistics book review articles. At this place it must be emphasised that the results of this study are limited due to a rather small extent of the corpus examined and also due to the focus on only one discipline. Therefore, it is better to understand the outcomes of the study as certain tendencies only.

What is common to both sub-corpora is the practice of reviewers to close the reviews with positive comments in order to draw the reader's attention to the most remarkable features of the book under review. Reviewers aim at balancing the positive and negative aspects of the review and therefore the majority of negative critical comments in both corpora occur in Move 3, not in Move 4. Both Anglophone and Czech reviewers consider closing the reviews in a favourable tone important, which is apparent from the occurrence of a higher amount of positive evaluative acts in Move 4. Both groups of reviewers point out positive aspects of the book in order to weaken the impact of negative critical comments possibly occurring earlier in the reviews. It is sometimes felt that what occurs at the end of the review is the most important. Furthermore, extensive criticism may influence the writer-author relationship negatively since it may be perceived as irreverent towards the book author. In small academic traditions like the Czech one, it is possible that the book author and the

review author know each other. Inserting a higher number of positive comments at the end of the review may avoid a potential discord between them. Infrequent negative comments occurring in concluding parts of the review may be a sign of consistency with other parts of the review the assessors attempt to maintain. In order to weaken criticism, both Anglophone and Czech reviewers employ various hedging strategies, which also contribute to maintain solidarity with the author of the book under review and to minimise imposition on them.

Apart from the similarities mentioned above, there are also obvious differences between both academic writing traditions confirming the fact that the use of evaluative acts in the genre of book review article depends not only on the text of the review but also on the academic culture of the reviewer, i.e. the variation in the distribution of evaluation is a factor of language culture. It is thus important to consider both linguistic and cultural aspects of the review. This finding has been supported by other studies examining critical comments in book reviews. For example, Moreno – Suárez (2008a) in their investigation into English and Spanish academic book reviews of literature demonstrate that Spanish reviewers employ fewer critical remarks than Anglophone reviewers and that their comments are in great majority positive. On the contrary, English reviews are more balanced in this respect. From this it follows that there are different rhetorical strategies across disciplines and cultures on how to solve potential discord between review genre requirements on one side and author-reviewer interpersonal relationship on the other. In this connection Moreno – Suárez (2008b, p. 162) emphasise that “it might therefore be strategically convenient for novice reviewers to take into account the book reviewing critical practices that are preferred in their own disciplinary contexts.”

An interesting cross-cultural variation appears in Move 2, sub-function 7 (*Stating the topic of each chapter*), Move 3, sub-function 9 (*Providing focused evaluation*), and in Move 4, sub-function 10 (*Completely positive evaluation*) and sub-function 11 (*Positive evaluation with aspects to improve*). Czech reviewers do not include any critical comments in Move 2, sub-function 7. This move generally belongs to purely descriptive moves in Czech review articles and evaluative acts are concentrated towards the end of the reviews. In Move 3, critical comments highlighting both positives and negatives of the book occurring in Czech reviews are more balanced than critical comments appearing in the Anglophone sub-corpus. This “balance principle” mirrors the way reviewers understand the purpose of this academic genre. Czech reviewers attempt to provide as objective and informed assessment of the book as possible, whereas their Anglophone counterparts, apart from this, focus on building up a relationship with the book author. In this connection, we can cite Shaw (2009, p. 217), who claims that the book review is a “disinterested genre” since in order to be credible, it must contain “evaluations with both positive and negative polarity”.

Neither Anglophone nor Czech book review articles contain information about the reviewer’s professional background or publications. Only their name occurs at the end of the review together with the reviewer’s affiliation. A reference to the reviewer’s expertise and qualifications could contribute to their position as a scientific authority, an expert in the field, and a renowned member of the academic community. All these could support the credibility of critical comments presented in the review.

It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate interpersonal metadiscourse features, which occurred in both sub-corpora quite frequently. They were included in the research only in case they contained evaluative comments; however, it would be useful to focus on them in a separate study since they play an important role in writer-reader interaction.

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## Summary

### **Evaluation in anglophone and Czech academic book reviews. A case study.**

The present paper analyses linguistic-rhetorical strategies conveying evaluation that are utilised by Anglophone and Czech reviewers of academic books from the field of Linguistics. The aim is to explore whether reviewers of one and the same disciplinary community but of different linguistic and cultural contexts adopt identical rhetorical strategies to convey evaluation. For this purpose, both positive and negative evaluative acts were identified in a corpus of 20 English and 20 Czech academic book review articles. The quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that the variation in the distribution of evaluative acts may be connected with the particular language culture. Furthermore, the results indicate that both groups of reviewers use hedging strategies not only to weaken criticism but also to maintain solidarity with authors of the reviewed books.