

Complimenting others: The case of English-written medical book reviews

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Abstract This paper examines a series of variables related to compliments in a corpus of 50 book reviews published in English-language medical journals in the period 1990–2000. The variables studied were: the book reviewed (book types), the book authorship (single/multi-authorship/editorship), and the book review itself (frequency and targets of compliments). Our results show that scientific activity in health sciences, like in any other field of research, is eminently social in the sense that it stresses the communicative interaction that takes place among its different participants, viz., the book reviewer, the book author/editor, the audience, the discipline to which the book belongs, and the journal in which the book review is published. The fact that the book content is the feature most positively valued may be considered as a proof of the professionalization of today's science. Finally, compliments, as a reflection of the ideational and interpersonal functions of language in the formulation of evaluative meaning, are used as linguistic-rhetoric strategies to establish and maintain a frame of solidarity and harmony within the discourse community in which they are produced.

Keywords genre analysis, book reviews, compliments, English-language medical discourse

1 Introduction

Given the ambiguity, implicitness and subjectivity inherent to the concept of evaluation (Hyland 2005, Martin 2003, Swales and Feak 1994), this issue has received a great deal of attention among linguists who have approached it from different angles. In this paper, the term *evaluation* is used to refer to “the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities that he or she is talking about” (Thompson and Hunston 2000: 5).¹

One particular genre in which evaluation has been widely studied is that of the book review (hereafter BR), a discursive genre characterized by three main functions: descriptive, informative and evaluative (Motta-Roth 1998, Gea Valor 2000, Carvalho 2002). Indeed, BRs are used to save time by facilitating the process of “sorting out that the disciplines, with their ever increasing influx of new publications, always require” (Belcher 1995: 140). Such attempts to respond to the needs of busy people for finding relevant research information are not new at all. As a matter of fact, the history of book reviewing has been traced back to 140 BC (Orteza y Miranda 1996). Since they are “significant indicators of scholarly communication” (Lindholm-Romantschuk 1998: VIII), BRs can be said to have contributed to the improvement of medical and/or scientific research in general and to have played an earlier role in the construction of scientific knowledge than the research article itself, a scholarly genre which emerged in the closing years of the 19th century and to which so much attention has been dedicated within the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement in the past three decades or so (Swales 1990 and 2004 among many others). Moreover, BRs serve “to evaluate the scholarly work of a professional peer within the scholarly community” (Lindholm-Romantschuk 1998: 40) and to “judge a text on its academic quality, clarity, integrity and value to the field” (Hyland 2000: 44).²

This “direct, public, and often critical, encounter with a particular text, and therefore of its author, who must be considered as a primary audience of the review” (Hyland 2000: 41), implies that, from a pragmatic standpoint, BRs must be regarded as a highly face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987). On the one hand, BRs basically involve the assessment of a colleague’s work. On the other hand, they stand out as an important rhetorical means to challenge textual authority for the general benefit of the discipline, and to establish rapport and solidarity with the members of the academic community. In addition, and if we draw on Halliday’s functional view of language (1994), we can state that BRs fulfil two primary functions: an ideational one where book reviewers express judgements and perceptions, and an interpersonal one which refers to the effort book reviewers make to strike a balance between “their compliments and praising comments and their criticisms and suggestions for improvement” (Gea Valor 2000: 25) or, in Hyland’s (2000: 41) and Salager-Meyer *et al.*s (2007b: 1761) parlance, “between critique and collegiality”.

In spite of the fact that the disincentives to write BRs are many and that BRs have a marginal status, it cannot be denied that this “intermediate genre” (Felber 2002: 169) serves a useful function for book reviewers (they can boost a fledging researcher’s profile), book authors, publishers and universities. The BR section indeed provides a space where academics can participate to the ongoing conversation in their disciplines by arguing to what extent others’ research contributes to the process of knowledge construction and discussion. Moreover, the frequency and importance of BRs as a discussion forum in which new contributions to a particular discipline are evaluated is to be understood as a social interaction (Bolívar 2001) between its different participants: the author of the book, the editor who has proposed the book for publication, the publisher who has published it, the reviewer who has accepted to review it and to inform any potential reader, and the reader who decides to buy the book or not.

2 Purpose and Corpus

Taking into account that the BR genre has not received the same interest in the field of health sciences as in other fields, the present study was undertaken to analyse this issue in depth. On the one hand, we aim at complementing our studies on negative appraisals in BRs published in English-, French- and Spanish-language medical journals (Alcaraz Ariza and Salager-Meyer 2005a and 2005b, Salager-Meyer and Alcaraz Ariza 2004, Salager-Meyer *et al.* 2005, 2006, 2007a and 2007b). On the other hand, we also aim at extending a previous work on expressions of praise found in a corpus of Spanish-language medical BRs (Alcaraz Ariza 2008).

Given the assertion that evaluation is an integral feature of the book review genre, our purpose in this paper is two-fold:

1. To identify the positive evaluative acts contained in our corpus, which involves identifying the evaluative language used for expressing a positive opinion on the book under review.
2. To identify the targets of compliments in our sample, i.e., who or what is praised: the whole book reviewed, any of its parts, its author in case of single-authored books, its editor in case of edited books, etc.

In studies of this kind, it is recommended to draw the sample texts from top-ranking journals because, as Connor (2004) argues, the articles published in these journals have undergone a strict peer review and editorial scrutiny. Such a procedure allows us to assert that the BRs selected are fairly representative of the journal genre in content and style, and that the texts

are “situationally effective” (Bazerman 1994: 23) and are the results of an “expert performance” (Bazerman 1994: 131).

Following these recommendations, we decided to randomly select 50 BRs published in the closing years of the 20th century (1990–2000) in five upper-stratum journals: *The British Medical Journal*, *JAMA* (the Journal of the American Medical Association), *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet* and *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The size of our sample amounts to 26,023 running words, with an average number of 520 running words per BR. Although the corpus examined is relatively small, we believe that the features found are sufficiently numerous to give some insight into the issue at hand because “investigations into technical and professional languages have demonstrated the representativeness of small-domain specific corpora, totalling 20,000–30,000 running words” (Fox 1999: 264).³

3 Methodology

3.1 Identification of compliments

According to Hyland (2000: 44), a compliment is “defined as an act which attributes credit to another for some characteristic, attribute, skill, etc., which is positively valued by the writer”. Such a positive evaluative act is defined as a positive remark on the book proper or on an element of it in relation to a given criterion. Different criteria of evaluation can be used to assess a book positively: its interestingness, usefulness or relevancy to a given field or to a potential audience, its readability, the quality and number of its illustrations, its current and numerous references, the prestige, experience or expertise of its author/editor, etc. Examples (1) and (2) show two different positive evaluative acts (underlined), the first one focusing on the book itself, more specifically on the information it provides, and the second one, on the bibliography of the book reviewed. In the first case, the criterion used to assess the book positively is its interestingness for a given audience. In the second case, the criteria used to assess the bibliography positively are its quality and quantity:

(1) *Sports Medicine Handbook* provides a wealth of information for members of the sports healthcare team, including clinicians and trainers.

(2) The references are largely current and contain many citations through 1997.

The text fragments included in Examples (1) and (2) above can be considered as positive evaluation since they develop propositional content expressing the writer’s mental representation, judgement, and sense-making of the elements of the book under review. Making connections with Halliday’s (1994) framework of functions of language (the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual), our definition of positive evaluative act falls within the scope of the propositional plane, which would perform both the ideational and interpersonal functions of language. The approach we have adopted for our analysis is further illustrated by Examples (3), (4), and (5):

(3) The illustrations, particularly the color plates, are of high quality.

(4) Physicians and other healthcare workers involved in sports medicine will find this well designed book immensely useful.

(5) It was a pleasure to read this authoritative text on the treatment of Parkinson's disease.

Example (3) refers to the high quality of the illustrations presented in the book under review. This is why this comment has been interpreted as a positive remark on this element of the book in particular. This semantically positive evaluation was coded as a compliment because it refers to a positive element of the book, i.e., the quality of its illustrations.⁴

The type of compliment included in Example (4), which consists in recommending the book by making reference to the potential readership, is very common in most of the BRs. This has already been pointed out by Motta-Roth (1998: 124), who states that “the role played by the readership constitutes a criterion used by linguists to praise new publications”. Hyland (2000: 48–49) also considered that “authors were largely praised for global features of their work, particularly content generalisations and recommendations to potential readers”.

In Example (5), it is again the positive semantic meaning of the adjective *authoritative*, applied to the book as a whole, which allows us to consider this example as a compliment. This semantically positive evaluation was coded as a compliment since it positively assesses an element of the book, in this case its authority. Moreover, the clause *It was a pleasure* creates a prospection (Sinclair 1993) or *prospecting logical act* (Moreno 2003: 133) which anticipates that the following fragment of text will be positive as it provides the justification for considering that the reading of the referred book will be *a pleasure*.

Also situated on the propositional plane of discourse are occurrences of the “good news–bad news” strategy (Belcher 1995: 145) or “polar comments in praise–criticism pairs” (Hyland 2000: 55). This rhetorical resource, which consists in juxtaposing two opposite opinions, is very frequent in academic BRs and is illustrated by Example (6). This example was coded as a compliment and the criterion used to positively value the book, in this case one of its chapters, is that of tackling a topic in depth:

(6) The chapter on the treatment of osteoporosis discusses hormone-replacement therapy in detail, but the bisphosphonates, the most rigorously investigated family of drugs in the field, is neglected.

However, evaluative acts are not always so easy to identify as the previous examples show. On the one hand, and as it has already been said, evaluation is very often characterized by its implicit nature and, on the other hand, it is not always encoded by lexico-grammatical means. So, if we want to identify all the evaluative remarks contained in a corpus, we need to take a corpus-driven approach (Butler 2004), which is based on the manual analysis of the texts and takes the context into account. According to *Relevance Theory*⁵, context denotes a:

“psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation.” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 15–16).

Some clauses in Examples (7), (8), and (9) would illustrate this inferential or pragmatic interpretation:

- (7) Essential data on epidemiology, diagnosis and genetics are condensed to fewer than 80 pages and are illustrated by algorithms and tables and supported by a consistent bibliography.

In Example (7) it is again the positive semantic value of the adjective *consistent*, which qualifies the bibliography, which allows us to identify the clause *supported by a consistent bibliography* as a compliment. By contrast, the clauses *Essential data on epidemiology, diagnosis and genetics are condensed to fewer than 80 pages and are illustrated by algorithms and tables* are in principle neutral stretches of propositional content. However, these apparently descriptive clauses can be interpreted as compliments when we take into account the context in which they are inserted, i.e., the *consistent bibliography* that supports them is what has allowed us to interpret them as positive remarks. In other words, their role as positive evaluative acts has been inferred from a pragmatic point of view. Both clauses were therefore considered as compliments, each of them referring to different elements of the book under review. Example (7) was thus coded as three compliments.

Another case very frequent in BRs is the presence of counterbalance, which serves to redress several specific face-threatening acts and to mitigate previous negative assessments. This rhetorical strategy is based on the principles of *Politeness Theory* (Brown and Levinson 1987) and has the interpersonal effect of contributing to “maintain social harmony and solidarity with the reviewee” (Gea Valor and del Saz Rubio 2000–2001). Example (8) illustrates this type of rhetorical evaluation resource:

- (8) The descriptions of measurement methods, such as bone densitometry, are factually precise, but a clinically oriented presentation would have been helpful with information on who should undergo measurements, with what machine and marker and how often; how the results should be used in decision making; and who should be treated, why, for how long, and with which drug. The chapter on bone markers is too negative. The chapter on the treatment of osteoporosis discusses hormone-replacement therapy in detail, but the bisphosphonates, the most rigorously investigated family of drugs in the field, are neglected. The recent reports on studies of the antifracture efficacy of aloxifene, residronate, and alendronate are not cited. A critical analysis of drugs such as calcitrocin, etidronate, and vitamin D analogues would have been instructive since these drugs are being used. Everything is in this book, but in some ways, everything is everywhere and further editing would have improved the cohesiveness of the text. Nevertheless, this is a reference book, there is an index, and my criticisms pale in comparison with the breadth and depth of the book, which I enjoyed reading and am delighted to recommend.

In Example (8), we can appreciate a certain degree of tension between the book author and the reviewer, and why not the audience, the editor(s) and the publisher(s) since the provision of several consecutive negative evaluative acts can be considered as a clear face-threatening act. However, the criticism uttered throughout the example is mitigated thanks to different rhetorical evaluation strategies. The first one consists in recurring to the “good news-bad news” (Belcher 1995) and to Hyland (2000) “polar comments in praise-criticism pairs” already commented upon in Example (6). The second one consists in a series of suggestions made by the reviewer in order to improve the book. The third one consists in balancing the

previously-stated negative criticisms by starting the last sentence with a sentence adverbial such as the adversative conjunct *nevertheless*, which shows that the generated tension is going to get released by providing immediate praise, which is effectively the case.

Coming back to our identification of positive remarks, the last sentence in Example (8) shows a sequence of four critical acts. In the clauses *this is a reference book* and *my criticisms pale in comparison with the breadth and depth of the book*, there is no problem in coding them as three compliments because they refer to different positive elements of the book reviewed. Yet, the clause *there is an index* is not so easy to be assigned a positive value since it is an apparently neutral and descriptive passage of language that does not contain any evaluation, either negative or positive. Nevertheless, it has been interpreted as a positive act of evaluation thanks to the pragmatic interpretation allowed by the context where it occurs.⁶ On the one hand, the referred clause follows a positive remark, similar to the prospection commented upon in Example (5), and, on the other, the element it qualifies belongs to a praised book, which means that the index, as one of its part, is praised too.

Moreover, the clause is followed by two remarks which, apart from being positive, also help to disambiguate the preceding proposition and interpret it as a positive evaluative act. Finally, the personal reviewer's implication present in the clauses *which I enjoyed reading and am delighted to recommend*, applied to the book, supports the previous instances of positive evaluation. In this sense, retrospective labels like these ones can be considered as cases of evaluation serving the interpersonal function of discourse (Moreno 2004: 169). Both clauses have not been considered as acts of evaluation in the strict propositional sense since they have helped to interpret propositional meaning created in the text itself rather than to add further propositional meaning. Example (8) was therefore coded as four compliments.

Example (8), like Example (6), illustrates that “providing reasons to justify both criticisms and compliments helps the reviewer to maintain his positive face and makes him come across as a rational individual who evaluates the book on the basis of his expertise and knowledge of the subject” (Gea Valor and del Saz Rubio 2000–2001: 171). In addition, positive remarks similar to those included in Example (8) are typical of the closing sections of BRs⁷ because “a concluding positive comment not only serves to offer a stronger endorsement of the volume, but also reconfirms an attention to reader sensitivities, creating a socially appropriate solidarity framework for the entire text.” (Hyland 2000: 54).

Example (9) is a further case in which apparently neutral/descriptive excerpts of language have been interpreted as positive acts of evaluation by virtue of the pragmatic interpretation operating on and beyond the sentence level.

- (9) The timing for this book may well be prescient: a revival of the therapeutic movement taking place? There are a number of books on various aspects of therapeutic communities. This book does not set out to emulate these, but to paint a picture of the diversity and colour within the movement.

Following our definition of evaluative acts, we can say that this example is formed by a sequence of four acts of evaluation. First, the fourth act consists in two coordinated phrases (*to paint a picture of the diversity and colour within the movement*) which focus on the same element, i.e., the content of the book under review. Second, if we take into account the context in which this fourth act occurs, we can pragmatically infer that it is an evaluative

act and that its meaning is positive. On the one hand, it is introduced by the adversative conjunct *but* which, in this case, is used to indicate that the previous statement is not significant in relation to what is going to be said. On the other hand, the concepts *diversity* and *colour* are usually given positive meanings. This evaluative act was thus interpreted as a compliment.

As for the first act of evaluation present in Example (9), its positive interpretation has been drawn from the meaning of the fourth act. In other words, only by adopting a pragmatic stance, i.e., by taking the context into account, is it possible to interpret this part of the text fragment as a positive comment. Example (9) was thus coded as two compliments.

3.2 Targets of compliments

When making an evaluation, the reviewer may focus on different elements such as the book in general, its content, its style, its chapters, its author or editor, etc. The following categories have been established to classify the different targets of compliments found in our sample:

- Conceptual, i.e., positive remarks directed towards the very content of the book reviewed e.g., (book as a whole, book sections, chapters, and chapter sections).
- Textual, i.e., positive remarks aimed at formal aspects, such as stylistic issues, book layout, and visual presentation (graphs, diagrams, tables, pictures, etc.).
- Personal, i.e., positive remarks voiced at the book author(s) and/or book editor(s) themselves.
- Contextual, i.e., positive remarks neither directed at the book content itself nor at the book author(s)/editor(s).

Examples (10), (11), and (12) would illustrate positive comments focused on conceptual targets, in particular those related to book sections, chapters and chapter sections:

- (10) The section on sports nutrition is richly flavoured with pragmatic and prudent dietary tips.
- (11) The new chapter by Hyman on the neurobiology of mental disorders is a gem.
- (12) There are short but useful sections on acute mixed-lineage leukemia and acute undifferentiated leukemia in the chapter on immunophenotyping.”

By contrast, the compliment targets voiced at in Examples (13) and (14) are of textual type since the visual presentation and stylistic issues are the elements positively valued:

- (13) The fine colour pictures, high quality X ray films, and informative tables would please any sports medicine enthusiast.
- (14) Sentences are short and crisp, and discussions are lean and muscular.

In Examples (15) and (16), it is the book authors' competence and book editors' experience, i.e., personal targets, which are praised:

- (15) This book is, without doubt, a comprehensive effort in bringing together the knowledge and skills of some of the most prestigious names in the world of video-assisted thoracic surgery.
- (16) *Making Use of Guidelines in Clinical Practice* is a multiauthor book whose editors have wide experience of guidelines, including the Royal College of General Practitioners' clinical guideline initiative.

Finally, Examples (17) and (18) would include compliments voiced at contextual targets. Example (17) positively assesses books different from the one under review and Example (18) values the field of paediatrics in a positive way:

- (17) Sackett's Evidence-based Medicine (Churchill Livingstone 1997) and Greenhalgh's How to Read a Paper (BMJ, 1997) are the gold standards for teaching the skills of evidence-based medicine.
- (18) It emphasizes the conventional wisdom of pediatrics, i.e., that a good interview and history are prerequisite to a correct diagnosis.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Characteristics of book reviews

As our purpose in this paper is to analyse the frequency and type of compliments found in a sample of BRs from a pragmatic point of view, we believe that it is also interesting to know the overall characteristics of the books being reviewed, i.e., whether they are single- or multi-authored books, etc. The first thing that we would like to point out is that the great majority of the books reviewed in our linguistic sample were works edited by one or more editors. We do not think that this observation is due to the random sampling procedure adopted here. We rather contend that it is a general trend in today's academic world with great significance in terms of the construction of scientific knowledge. Indeed and as Table 1 shows, the fact that there are a total of 33 single- and co-edited books (practically the double co-edited than single-authored) could mean that, at least in health sciences, editorial work, and principally, the co-editorial one, would ease the search of researchers interested in a certain topic. We could also speculate that these books under review are composed of chapters written by different authors who have turned into editors. Likewise, the predominance of edited books could be a consequence of the strong pressure exerted by the academic world on scientists, that of *publish or perish*, if they want or need to promote their career, i.e., to receive grants and money for their research projects.

Finally, we could also think that we are facing a phenomenon frequently found in today's science, which consists in inflating the list of authors (and why not of editors?). This phenomenon is metaphorically called *ghost and host authors* (Mowatt *et al.* 2002, among others). This problem is especially crucial within the biomedical community where *ghost* and *gift* (i.e., honorific) authorship⁸ in large, multicentre clinical trials has attracted the ire of the mass media and of those campaigning for ethics in the dissemination of medical research information, where it is estimated that between 10 and 50% of research is ghost-written (Wooley *et al.* 2006).

Table 1: Reviewed book authorship

| Number of one/multi-authored/edited reviewed books | | | |
|--|----|----------------------|----|
| One author | 11 | One editor | 7 |
| More than one author | 06 | More than one editor | 26 |
| Total authored books | 17 | Total editored books | 33 |

A second point worth pointing out is that monographs, i.e., books with a detailed study of only one subject, are the type of books most frequently reviewed, much more frequent than Proceedings, which are hardly present in our sample (only two books). This is not surprising as Proceedings correspond to communications presented in conferences where usually only the most relevant data of research are communicated because of the short time conceded, the more detailed work being kept for its publishing in specialized journals or in monographs. Moreover, these contributions may tackle different topics and the reviewer should be an expert in many branches to adequately evaluate all of them. This last point would therefore be in agreement with the predominance of edited or co-edited books commented upon in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 2, the second most frequently reviewed book type corresponds to textbooks, i.e., books containing facts about a particular subject mostly read by medical students, while the third position corresponds to guidelines or books containing official advice about how to do something. This relatively high number of textbooks, which are usually single- and multi-authored books, shows the importance of this type of book for the preparation of future practitioners. If textbooks cover the area of theoretical learning/teaching, guidelines contain clear recommendations for clinical practice including practical issues, while monographs are needed to keep abreast of the research being done in the field analysed. These three text-types would thus complement each other for the best medical formation.

Table 2: Type of book reviewed

| Book type | Number |
|----------------------|--------|
| Monographs | 31 |
| Textbooks | 11 |
| Guidelines | 6 |
| Proceedings | 2 |
| Total books reviewed | 50 |

4.2 Book reviews containing compliments

A careful reading of the 50 BRs examined here shows that all but one contain compliments, this one being a neutral summary of the book entitled *Restoring the Balance: Women Physicians and the Profession of Medicine, 1850-1995*. This a-critical BR would resemble BRs published in the first issues of the journal *Medical and Philosophical Commentaries*, which were impartial comments where book reviewers did not give any personal opinion with regard to the content of the book (Chalmers 2000). In fact, the editor of that journal urged book reviewers to avoid, as much as possible, either applauding or condemning any author, because, as he put it, the chief aim of that section was “to give such a view of books as may enable every reader to judge for himself” (Duncan 1773: 9). Incidentally, this rhetorical feature seems to be a distinctive feature of early scientific BRs (i.e., not only medical BRs) because Hyland (2000: 2) made the exact same remark regarding scientific BRs in general which only “served to summarize and chronicle uncritically the explosion of learning in the sciences”.

Moreover, the fact that 49 BRs evaluate in a positive way some elements of the books reviewed is in line with the guidelines for submitting BRs provided by, for instance, the *Linguist List* where, in addition to summarising the book's purpose and contents, reviewers are asked to “point out some of the merits and defects of the book, identify problems, ask questions, and present positive or negative implications of the analyses contained in it” (*Linguist List* 2009: 2).⁹

4.3 Compliments in book reviews

We have counted a total of 498 compliments, with an average of 9.96 positive comments per BR (see Table 3). The high number of positive evaluations (409) voiced at conceptual and textual targets could be considered as an attempt of neutrality from the reviewer, who prefers to focus on the book itself and not on its author(s), although it is true that when a book is evaluated, its author is implicitly evaluated as well. On the one hand, the difference between the number of compliments voiced at conceptual targets (335) and that aimed at textual targets (74) would imply that the latter are not a question of priority for the reviewers who are more interested in the content of the book than in its form. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that nowadays orthographic, and even linguistic, mistakes are not usually found in books, which is a consequence of the use of computer built-in dictionaries. Neither should it be forgotten that the way books and many other kinds of texts have to be structured and presented is usually a publishers' requirement. Issues of this kind are therefore much less frequently evaluated, either positively or negatively.

With respect to the presence of positive remarks addressed towards personal targets, it confirms that “congratulating the author or praising the work of the author is another way of recommending the book” (Motta-Roth 1998: 111). With reference to compliments voiced at contextual targets, they are probably due to the book author(s)' desire to contextualise the book under review within a given specialised medical field. They may also be due to their inclusion in *Related Readings*, a section which, as we have already said, is compulsory in the BRs published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, one of the journals included in our corpus. Had we analysed another journal where this section devoted to highlighting the merits of other related books is not compulsory, our results would likely have been different.

Table 3: Compliments per target type

| Targets | Number & percentage of compliments |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Conceptual | 335 (67.3%) |
| Textual | 74 (14.8%) |
| Total Conceptual/Textual | 409 (82.1%) |
| Personal | 56 (11.2%) |
| Contextual | 33 (6.60%) |
| Total compliments | 498 (100%) |

Table 4 summarizes the positive comments aimed at conceptual targets. The first and second positions in this Table correspond to the elements *book as a whole* and *chapters*, which is in agreement with Hyland's statement that "it is mostly a chapter of the book reviewed or the book itself that is positively valued" (2000: 47). These two elements are usually accompanied by the remaining elements. All these elements put together help highlight the quality of a book whose reading is being recommended.

Table 4: Compliments voiced at conceptual targets

| Conceptual targets | Number & percentage of compliments |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Book as a whole | 159 (47.5%) |
| Chapters | 71 (21.2%) |
| Chapter sections | 56 (16.7%) |
| Book sections | 49 (14.6%) |
| Total conceptual targets | 335 (100%) |

As for compliments addressed towards personal targets, Table 5 shows that *competence* is the most positively valued, not only with reference to *book author(s)* but also to *book editor(s)*. In the case of *book author(s)*, this would be a logical consequence of all the merits credited to the authors, i.e., their competence together with the prestige and the experience acquired in their field of research have allowed them to write the book being reviewed. Moreover, if an editor has decided to choose a given book for its review, it is assumed that the book is worth reviewing, which implicitly means that its author(s) is/are also worth being praised for writing it. With respect to *book editor(s)*, the fact that *competence* is also the skill most positively valued could be explained

in terms similar to those related to *book author(s)*. When an editor proposes a certain book for its review, he is supposed to know that this book is worth reviewing. This implies that he is doing his work well and thus deserves to be praised for it.

The *experience* element is worthwhile mentioning here. In the case of *book author(s)*, this element is probably needed to write a good book, whereas in the case of *book editor(s)*, it is not always necessary, mainly in multi-edited books where it is more a question of professional contacts, i.e., of compiling works from different authors. This explanation would account for the only positive comment aimed at the element *experience* found in the personal targets related to *book editor(s)*.

Table 5: Compliments voiced at personal targets

| Personal targets | Number & percentage of compliments book author(s) | Number and percentage of compliments book editor(s) |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Competence | 19 (61.3%) | 20 (80.0%) |
| Prestige | 08 (25.8%) | 04 (16.0%) |
| Experience | 04 (12.9%) | 01 (4.0%) |
| Total personal targets | 31 (100%) | 25 (100%) |

5 Conclusions

The present research on the analysis of compliments in English-language BRs disclosed some interesting qualitative and quantitative features of this genre of academic writing which only recently became the object of linguistic enquiry. First, the present study has considered as positive acts of evaluation those remarks whose semantic content leads directly to their positive interpretation and those which – though descriptive or ambiguous meaning at first sight – can be interpreted as positive evaluative acts thanks to the context in which they appear. In this sense, our analysis shows the strong connection between evaluation and pragmatic meaning already acknowledged by Fetzer (2005), Suárez Tejerina (2006), and Moreno and Suárez (2008), who situate evaluation on both the semantic and the pragmatic levels, and differs from that of Hyland (2000), who considers that an evaluative act is generally realised by a single sentence.

A second point to be commented upon is the overwhelming majority of compliments voiced at conceptual and textual targets (related to the book itself). Conceptual concerns reflect the cognitive complexity of the scientific enterprise, and the textual ones mirror the fact that words do not suffice, which explains why scientists rely on visuals to satisfy science's argumentative needs. Both types of targets would be a sign of the professionalization of today's science.

We would now like to compare the results found in this paper with those found in previous studies on negative appraisals in similar English- and Spanish-language BR samples (Salager-Meyer *et al.* 2004 and 2007a). With reference to the English-language sample, those studies showed that only 35 BRs (70%) out of the 50 BRs analysed contained negative appraisals *vs.* 49 BRs (98%) with positive appraisals. On the one hand, the higher presence of positive evaluation could lead us to speculate that English-speaking reviewers are perhaps fairly concerned with interpersonal issues (concord seeking, rapport, collegial respect, peer antagonism, etc.). On the other

hand, the fact that conceptual targets (books or book chapters) are the most recurrent thematic subjects of negative and positive remarks could also be considered as a sign of the professionalization of today's science.

As for the Spanish-language BR sample, our analysis showed that 49 BRs (98%) out of the 50 BRs analysed contained negative comments. In this sense, these results are similar to those found in a previous study on compliments in the same Spanish-language sample of medical BRs (Alcaraz Ariza 2008). This sameness of negative and positive evaluation in Spanish-language BRs could allow positing that the Spanish-speaking academics may be not only much more critical, but also more balanced in their judgements than their English counterpart. Like in the case of the English-language sample, the conceptual targets are again the core of the negative and positive comments.

A fuller understanding of compliments in medical BRs would obviously require more extensive and varied data gathering and analysis. Indeed, the data presented here are limited in scope and number. First of all, the corpus examined is quite small. We however believe that the features found are sufficiently numerous to give some insight into the issue at hand. Second, the results obtained in this research may have to do with the kind of journals we deliberately consulted, viz., core, upper-stratum journals that are expected to publish reviews of books useful to their discursive community. It could very well be that the essentially evaluative nature of BRs differed in less prestigious journals, i.e., that giving personal opinions, either criticizing negatively or complimenting others' contributions, may be non-existent and that BRs may be more neutral summaries of the book objectives, descriptions and content, than critical analyses *per se*. •

Notes

- ¹ In this sense, evaluation seems to overlap with other concepts such as "attitude" (Halliday 1994), "epistemic modality" (Stubbs 1996, Hyland 1998) or "appraisal" (Martin 2000, Painter 2003, Martin and White 2005), to name just a few. Whichever the label adopted, it is clear that this diversity of approaches is a proof of the importance acquired by the topic of evaluation, which even led to a special issue in the journal *TEXT* in 2003 (23: 2) and to the celebration of an International Congress entirely devoted to it in July 2005 at the University of Augsburg (Germany).
- ² Among other authors who have dealt with the evaluative and communicative nature of BRs, see Johnson and Roen (1992), Swales and Feak (1994), Schramm (1996), Salager-Meyer (1999, 2001), Burgess and Fagan (2004), Shaw (2004), Römer (2005), or Suárez Tejerina (2005).
- ³ For the value of working with small, specialized corpora in genre analysis studies, see, among others, Mauranen (1993), Henry and Roseberry (2001), Connor and Upton (2005), Flowerdew (2005), Webber (2005) or Meyer, cited in Pérez-Llantada Auria (2006).
- ⁴ For a very interesting study on the problems related to an adequate identification of positive evaluative acts, see Hunston (2004).
- ⁵ *Relevance Theory* falls within the field of *Cognitive Pragmatics*.
- ⁶ According to *Appraisal Theory*, this type of evaluation would be called *evoking/implicit* as opposed to *inscribed/explicit* evaluation, the latter describing those instances conveying a clear attitudinal/evaluative meaning (White 2001: 2-3).
- ⁷ This structure would not be possible in journals such as *Annals of Internal Medicine*, where BRs are written with subheadings, much like structured abstracts in many medical research journal articles. The subheadings typically used are: *Field of medicine*, *Format* (e.g., soft cover book), *Audience* (e.g., primary care physicians), *Purpose*, *Content*, *Highlights* (i.e., positive aspects of the book), *Limitations* (i.e., negative appraisals), *Related Readings*, and *Reviewer* (his name, his medical specialty and the institution where he works).
- ⁸ The expression *medical ghost writer* is a relatively new term in medicine, different from the ghostwriting of autobiographies, fiction, and political speeches in the sense that the former is a medical writer paid by the

pharmaceutical industry, contract research organizations, and/or medical communication agencies that serve the industry. Some medical writers are employed by the industry or its service agencies while others are self-employed and work under contracts. In science, then, *ghost authors* are people who contribute to the research, but are not given authorship credit for whatever reason, while *gift authors* are individuals who make no contributions but still receive authorship credit.

⁹ Available at <http://www.linguistlist.org/pubs/reviews/guidelines.html>.

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