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ABSTRACT

A study of the discourse of book reviews in several academic disciplines examines how interaction of text and context varies across disciplines. Sixty academic book reviews in linguistics, chemistry, and economics were analyzed for rhetorical structure and for the communicative goal of the genre, that of evaluating knowledge production. The book reviews were expected to present certain general, invariable features of rhetorical organization in content and form that allow readers and writers to recognize them as belonging to the same genre. In addition, some variation was expected in features most closely associated with the traditions and conventions of the discourse community. Results indicate that textual features respond to the characteristic culture of each field and to institutional discourses, and that, as a result, any suggestions for teaching and research of academic written genres should take into account the specific evaluative practices in the target disciplines. It is suggested that the results can also contribute to the debate about the definition of generic textual boundaries and the ethnographic nature of genre studies. Contains 38 references. The 60 book reviews are also listed. (Author/MSE)

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Investigating connections between text and discourse communities: A cross-disciplinary study of evaluative discourse practices in academic book reviews

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Research in the larger field of Applied Linguistics has indicated the importance of studying functional-rhetorical patterns of academic genres in connections with their parent discourse communities. This paper discusses how the study of the interplay between text and context can lead to a better understanding of variations within one academic genre across fields. Drawing from the Sociology of Science and Genre Analysis, academic disciplines are defined as Discourse Communities that act as powerful frameworks for meaning production in text. Sixty academic book reviews divided evenly among Linguistics, Chemistry, and Economics are analyzed for their rhetorical structure and for the communicative goal of the genre, namely that of evaluating knowledge production. The book reviews in the corpus were expected to present certain general invariable features of rhetorical organization in content and form that allow writers and readers to recognize them as belonging to the same genre. At the same time, some variation was expected in features most closely associated with the traditions and conventions of the discourse community. The results indicated that textual features respond to the characteristic culture of each field and to institutional discourses and, that, as a result, any suggestions for teaching and research of academic written genres should take the specificities of evaluative practices in the target discipline into account. The results obtained may contribute to the debate about the definition of generic textual boundaries and the ethnographic character of genre studies.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time there has been a prevailing belief in science as a unified, indivisible whole with a number of uniform genres carrying out certain academic functions across disciplines. In the past, examples such as that of the philosopher Leibniz, that tried to devise an ideal language that would synthesize the basic tenets of a Cartesian logic of discovery applicable to all sciences, have illustrated this unified view of science. More recently, however, scholarship in the rhetoric of science has tended to criticize this idea of a universally valid

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language superior to specific fields on the grounds that there is no single adequate model of science to be adopted in all fields:

The goal [in devising an ideal language] was to yield a single methodology for all fields—that is, a unified science. Such programs were loosely tied to an idealized (and erroneous) view of physics, taken as the height of Science. (Nelson et al., 1987b:13)

This criticism to the unity of the sciences under a universal physical model has called attention to the incompatibility of two opposing forces: the generality of an ideal language and the specific domains of each discipline (Baker and Hacker, 1984). Even if an ideal universal language successfully provided scientists with a taxonomic vocabulary for a series of basic rhetorical tasks of classical inspiration such as classifying, describing and generalizing in all disciplines, scholars would still need a specialized vocabulary essentially associated with the theoretical aspects of their specific areas (ibid.: 24).

In opposition to the universalizing Cartesian tradition, Toulmin (1972) takes a social perspective on science and suggests that most scientific disciplines should be regarded as individual, compact cultures characterized by five features:

- 1) **Disciplinary activities** geared to a special set of consensual goals;
- 2) **Collective goals** that impose corresponding demands on all discipline members;
- 3) **Discussions** that provide loci for the production of arguments (“reasons”) to warrant procedural innovations and improve the current repertoire of concepts or techniques;
- 4) **Professional forums** where knowledge production is used to warrant consensus around innovations;

5) **Criteria of adequacy**, established by the consensual goals, to be applied in judging the arguments produced to support innovations in the discipline (ibid.:160).

For Toulmin, academic disciplines would ultimately consist of consensual ideals that define the modus operandi adopted by practitioners along with the whole set of linguistic, cognitive, and instrumental apparatuses relevant to the discipline.

Adopting a similar perspective, Kuhn ([1962]1970:174-210) understands each scientific field as a network of epistemological and linguistic resources available to its practitioners. An area of knowledge is a mature scientific field when its members gravitate around the following set of four elements with no or little disagreement (ibid.:11):

1) **Symbolic Generalizations** or the formal expressions that encapsulate established knowledge in the field, generally accepted and employed univocally by group members;

2) **Metaphysical Paradigms** or the generalized commitment to particular theories which guide the definition of the inventory of researchable problems and their importance;

3) **Values** or the merit discussed when members have to choose ways of carrying out their disciplinary activities; and

4) **Exemplars** or concrete applications of solutions to those problems created within the discipline which are learned by novice members along their process of academic literacy in the field (classes, laboratory research, readings, etc.).

In Kuhn's definition of disciplinary fields, the relationship between disciplinary cultures and texts consists in the fact that the tradition pertaining to a disciplinary culture surfaces in academic texts through argument construction as can be seen in a simple two-word example such as the expression 'rigorous research'. The words 'rigor' and 'research'

represent a paradigm, i.e., ‘universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provided model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners’ (Kuhn, [1962]1970:viii). The paradigm implied by the words ‘rigor’ and ‘research’ is the one consecrated in modern science, in which the only form of research is the direct, objective observation of a natural phenomenon with the researcher’s description (not interpretation) of the data. Its definition as ‘rigorous’ is in direct relation to the physics/mathematics paradigm launched about three centuries ago and maintained along most part of this century without dissent as *the* paradigm in science. Thus ‘rigorous’ can be connected to ‘mathematical’ as a ‘Symbolic Generalization’, i.e., in a synonymical relationship; as a recognition of the prevailing paradigm of physics and mathematics as prototypical sciences (‘Metaphysical Paradigm’); as a ‘Value’, a powerful constraint over research practices among group members (Kuhn, [1962] 1970:186) and over production of new knowledge (i.e., new books); or still as an ‘Exemplar’ of how to develop the study of a given problem within the field (i.e., ‘with rigor’). Thus, Kuhn’s concepts of symbolic generalization, metaphysical paradigm, value, and exemplar can be found underlying texts.

Contributions to the discussion about the relationship between disciplinary cultures and texts have also been given in the past by ethnographic studies. Becher (1981), for example, investigates the “scientific status” of disciplinary cultures taking into account how the episteme (the object of teaching and research in the discipline) and culture (the nature of the body of knowledge existing in each area) are considered by researchers from other fields. Biology and physics, for example, are seen as examples of true science by dint of their rigorous and quantitatively precise methods of investigation. Contrariwise, Sociology

is seen as a "pseudo-science" because of its fragmented character and its lack of a solid body of epistemological principles usually found in "pure science" (ibid.: 110-11)¹.

Becher (1987) further finds contrastive knowledge structures in written texts. He argues that, on the one hand, sociologists struggle to see one theoretical account win over another in their texts, due to the rather unstable nature of the problem they study. Historians, on the other hand, are primarily atheoretical and therefore do not build on disputes over theories, being more concerned about practical things such as the tools and techniques available to carry out their inquiry (as for example, interpretation of old documents).

Physicists are also unconcerned about disputes over theoretical questions in their texts but for different reasons. While the nature of historical knowledge involves the subjective judgment by the audience instead of an irrefutable demonstrable evidence, physics rests upon firmly based epistemological settlements about observable natural phenomena².

One can always argue that Becher's discussion shows the nature of academic disciplines as not inherently uniform but as comprehending coexistent tendencies. What seems to stand out is the idea of intensity: some disciplines are more intense in carrying out internal controversies over competing theories such as sociology, while others, such as contemporary physics, have a broader set of well-established tenets, internally accepted without significant dissent. This indeed has already been pointed out by Kuhn ([1962]1970:viii) in commenting on how he was 'struck by the number and extent of the overt disagreements between social scientists about the nature of legitimate scientific problems and methods.' The endemic character of this disagreement comes as a surprise to

a member of the physicist community where scholarship practice ‘normally fails to evoke the controversies over fundamentals’ (ibid.).

Kuhn’s and Toulmin’s views on academia lend themselves to the interpretation of academic fields as ‘disciplinary matrices’ that have particular modes of knowledge production, communication, and evaluation resulting in autonomous ‘discourse communities’, with particular cultures, i.e. modes of knowledge construction and evaluation.

Based on the assumption that a given disciplinary community shares forms of argument and lexicon that convey common knowledge and constitute rhetorical devices that are used in evaluative rhetoric (see, for example, Leff, 1987:33; Aristotle, 1986:83), the present study aims to investigate the extent to which variability in evaluation, the defining feature of the genre book review varies across disciplines.

The corpus of the analysis comprehends a total of 180 BRs containing 174,364 words, representing a sum of an equal number of texts extracted from linguistics, economics, and chemistry journals, forming three groups of sixty (60) texts from each discipline. The 180 texts for the corpus were collected from research journals between November 1993 and March 1994. The corpus is analyzed in two moments. First, a smaller corpus of 60 texts (20 in each discipline, encompassing 55,925 words) undergoes a detailed, qualitative analysis for the terms of praise and blame used by reviewers to evaluate books. In the second moment, all 180 texts in the corpus are analyzed quantitatively for these terms across disciplines. It is assumed that the frequency with which reviewers use certain terms to evaluate books and the nature of these terms can, to a certain extent, indicate how

evaluative discourses vary across disciplinary boundaries. Thus, with the help of a microconcord program (Scott and Johns, 1988), which makes it possible to search for specific words or expressions through large amounts of text, patterns of occurrence of evaluative terms are verified quantitatively (if certain terms are more or less frequent in one discipline than in another) and the context (portions of the text) in which they occur.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DISCIPLINARY CULTURES AND TEXT

The analysis revealed an essentially evaluative quality to economics BRs, where reviewers dedicate larger portions of texts to evaluation than in the other two disciplines. In addition, while most chemistry reviewers evaluate the book positively, most texts in economics are negatively oriented. In chemistry, for instance, only two BRs have a negative final evaluation and this is conveyed with a hedged tone: instead of definitely recommending/disqualifying the book, the reviewer closes the text by recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings.

[C#4] In this reviewer's opinion this text is written well below a level desirable for graduate students or research scientists in analytical chemistry; however, it should be of interest to those in other disciplines who desire only an overview of the several chromatographic techniques.

Conversely, a number of texts in economics (7 BRs) and also in linguistics (5 BRs) carry more explicitly negative appraisals of the book. Most of them (6 in economics and 4 in linguistics) have negative final evaluations.

[L#13] In conclusion, I should like to sum up my comments as follows: L was published too late; the authors tend to argue *ex cathedra*. L is not even a state-of-the-art report. There are probably some instructive passages in L, but, after all, they hide behind too many failings. Thus, L is everything but good propaganda for

NM. Under these circumstances, the best one can do is forget about this failure and repair the damage done, as soon as possible, by a less heterogeneous, more data-oriented, theoretically more explicit and sounder monograph. For this purpose, I suggest an in-depth study on the diachronic morphology of an individual language instead of perpetuating the original jumble of selected isolated examples.

[E#13] Perhaps the potential benefits from completion of the internal market of the European Community are great. Certainly it is commendable for researchers to begin to look beyond the static, competitive paradigm for likely effects of further integration in Europe. But I for one remain unconvinced by the evidence marshalled in *The Economics of 1992*.

These BRs are openly negative due to the more consistent presence of certain features such as the following:

(i) Personal tone, e.g., ‘But I for one remain unconvinced by the evidence marshalled in *The Economics of 1992*’.

(ii) Directness, use of explicit negative comments, e.g., ‘L is not even a state-of-the-art report’, ‘Thus, L is everything but good propaganda for NM.’

(iii) Deemphasis of positive comments with hedging terms, e.g., ‘Perhaps the potential benefits from completion of the internal market of the European Community are great’, ‘There are probably some instructive passages in L’.

It can be contended that negative evaluation may demand longer and more elaborate argumentation since negative criticism can be expected to arouse more conflict and thus to need more warrants and data to be proved. Positive comments, conversely, involve less face-threatening negotiations and thus are bound to raise less resistance resulting in a more synthetic argument. Following this idea, the greater amount of space dedicated to focused evaluation in linguistics (4,957 words) and economics (6,228 words), areas that

use more negative evaluation, in comparison to chemistry (2,691), area with more positive BRs, would confirm economics BRs as the most evaluative texts, followed by those in linguistics, and finally by those in chemistry.

VARIATION IN EVALUATION PRACTICES IN BOOK REVIEWS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

The analysis of the texts revealed that chemists tend to be more objective, using a more global view of the book, without providing exhaustive descriptions and evaluations. Economists and linguists, on the other hand, tend to have a lengthier and more elaborated argumentation, more “literary” (McCloskey, 1981) with the use of metaphors (Klamer, 1987) and ‘humanistic literary flourish’ (Swales, 1993b) in the case of economics, or more didactic, with the use of plenty of exemplification and glossing in the case of linguistics. These differing ways in which practitioners of each area describe and evaluate with variable amount of detail and evaluation point to the existing variability within the same genre of academic BRs. How practitioners refer to previously produced knowledge was investigated in association with expressions deployed without dissent by group members, i.e., “symbolic generalizations” (Kuhn, 1962:182) and “values” commonly used in each field when judging books. For Kuhn, commitment to such values provides a sense of community within the discipline (ibid.: 184).

Also, differences were found in how readers are provided with background information related to the nature of the topic discussed in the book. The greater amount of detail and exemplification provided in linguistics (and less emphatically in economics) may indicate the reviewer’s comprehension that, although writer and readership share a

certain amount of knowledge, there is still a need to call attention to certain aspects of the discipline that may not be as readily available, i.e., not belonging to that portion of common knowledge.

[L#6] It raises questions about some of the central policy-making professional institutions (**like** the Center for Applied Linguistics), the most powerful funding agencies for adult education in the US (**like** the Office of Refugee Resettlement), and the largest ESOL programs in the world.

A greater reliance on exemplification may stem from the writer's belief that the lower the audience level, the more it relies on examples for exposition (Nwogu, 1990:178). Thus, in this case, the reviewer assumes a didactic position in discussing the book, attempting to explain or clarify concepts that may be unfamiliar to the reader. Such concepts are referred to by terms in parentheses or apposition. In comparison, chemistry reviewers tend to be more symmetrical in their relationship with the reader in that the concepts and nomenclature used do not seem to demand as much further exemplification and dated references, reflecting a recognition of the field as a cohesive culture.

Evaluative practices in BRs relate to characteristic ways of arguing in the discipline for the acceptance of new publications, taking into account what is considered to be desirable/undesirable or important/unimportant in the intellectual apparatus of the field (in this case, the book). Values are expressed by particular linguistic items, certain terms used by reviewers to evaluate books that convey the criteria of adequacy mentioned by Toulmin, to be applied in judging new arguments. They are referred to in Aristotle's

Rhetoric (1991:48) as ‘terms of praise and blame’, which are used to demonstrate the merit of a given person or thing.

Such terms of praise and blame were collected in the corpus and classified into a set of seven contrastive dimensions: *Persuasive-Unconvincing*, *Attractive-Uninteresting*, *Comprehensive-Specific*, *Recent-Outdated*, *Clear-Undefined*, *Testable-Speculative*, and *Deep-Simplistic*.

Economics: Persuasive-Unconvincing and Attractive-Uninteresting

In general, economists show great concern with mathematics, method, and theory, a characteristic that is becoming more and more valued in the field³. This concern is frequently mirrored in the texts when reviewers use words such as “mathematics” and “theory” to praise books (‘mathematics is very neat and well presented’; ‘[the] book is very good in using theory for analysis of topics’), as well as to blame them (‘importance of some mathematical results is not convincing’; ‘several logical problems with theoretical arguments’). The general need for the combination of mathematics and theory is felt in the massive reference to models, a basic construct in the economic field:

[E#14]...there are some drawbacks... A more substantive point is that the partial equilibrium diagrams make it impossible to compare the same model under alternative assumptions.

Concordances for the word ‘model(s)’ show entries for the term in economics appearing more than twice as frequently in economics (once every 434 words) as they do in linguistics (1,033 words) or four times as much as in chemistry (1,872 words). Models

are seen as an element of solution to the central problem in the economic inquiry, i.e., predicting market swings:

[E#11]...he presents a model to explain why the unprecedented swings in the value of the dollar in the 1980s had only a limited impact on the adjustment of external imbalances...

In [E#9] the reviewer classifies the author of the book as “optimistic” in viewing economists as policy advisers that compensate for the disadvantages of “simple models”.

[E#9] In his view, simple models are just not good enough. There will always remain a role for the economist as a policy adviser. After this rather optimistic conclusion in Chapter 4, Part III takes a twist by observing that new classical macroeconomics is in need of adequate micro-foundations for monetary theory....

He points out that the author soon realizes the mistake in superestimating the economist’s role and “takes a twist” toward theory.

Economics BRs in the corpus mirror the general need of reaffirming the status of the discipline as an objective, quantitative field of study in terms of the commonly consecrated positivist model of science, favoring the persuasive-unconvincing dimensions of terms for praise and blame. To credit a book as persuasive is to accord it a high value, usually through the use of expressions that relate to rational solutions and justifications for economic questions offered by the author of the book, such as ‘lucid book full of sound judgments’, ‘lucid exposition’, ‘plausible account’, ‘arguments specially persuasive’, ‘well justified’. Conversely, when reviewers want to discredit a book, they define it as unconvincing (‘book lacks a convincing and plausible measure of effects’, ‘authors are

unconvincing’, ‘denunciation unsupported and untenable’, ‘adventurous and eccentric treatment of materials’, ‘lack of convincing plausible measure’). The preference for using terms such as “rigorous” to praise a book expresses the traditional central axis of the mathematical thinking as expressed by Leibniz, that is, truth propositions are those that can be demonstrated with exactness, precision, and objectivity (Loi, 1988).

Furthermore, in order to receive a positive recommendation, books must present characteristics pointing towards the ‘attractive’ end of the attractive-uninteresting continuum. Expressions referring to mathematics are often accompanied by different terms used to praise the book such as “very neat”, “well presented”. Expressions such as ‘neat formal model’, ‘magnificent book (updated and attractive)’, ‘easily digestible and indeed highly attractive way’, ‘sophisticated analysis’, ‘quite remarkable results’, ‘important set of issues is addressed’ tend to emphasize the elegance with which writers treat the topic of the book. The opposite evaluation is conveyed by expressions that emphasize the lack of interest aroused by the whole or parts of the book: ‘disappointing’, ‘frustrating’, ‘lacks interest’, ‘tedious recitation of statistics’, ‘book does not quite live up to its spirit’.

Chemistry: Comprehensive-Specific and Recent-Outdated

The comprehensive-specific dimension seems pervasive in the evaluation of chemistry books. Related terms that emphasize the existence of abundant and ample information qualify positively varying aspects of the book: ‘comprehensive, highly condensed, systematic collection of literature references’, ‘discusses a number of topics’, ‘makes available at one’s fingertips a wealth of information concerning a broad range of reaction types’, ‘surveys an extensive literature’. Conversely, terms of blame define the

book as 'too highly specialized for the average chemist', 'thin book', 'only one passing reference', imparting the idea that the book is too specific to accommodate the broadness of the field. Comprehensiveness seems to be related to the fast pace with which chemistry unfolds into new subdivisions and interdisciplinary issues, so that for a book to be favorably evaluated it must provide the most productive account of a great number of recent topics and references.

Thus, time appears as an important factor in chemistry, with reviewers usually emphasizing the recency of the publication as a necessary condition for being considered worth reading. Surveys of the time lag between the date chemistry books were published and the date they were reviewed reveal that reference to recency in BRs respond to the needs of the disciplinary context: usually more than 60% of the books are reviewed within one year after being published, and 90% are reviewed within two years (Motta-Roth, 1995b; Chen, 1976). Economics has an intermediary pattern between chemistry and linguistics, with more than half of the books (52.3%) being reviewed in the second year of being on the market. Linguistics has an opposite pattern from chemistry, with most books (78.7%) being reviewed between two to three years after appearing in the market, and only 20% of the books being reviewed within a year after publication showing that promptness in evaluating new publications in linguistics does not seem to be a primary concern as it is in chemistry.

In two year's time, an advanced chemistry book becomes outdated; in three years, it is already considered obsolete. Timeliness as a characteristic aspect of the field has a direct correspondence to the texts themselves. Knowledge structure in chemistry (as in physics) is

conceived of as atomistic, fractionated into small sub-topics in such a way that each researcher is able to identify an independent set of theoretical questions to be studied (Becher, 1987), as a result, accretion of knowledge in the discipline occurs fast and efficiently. Chemistry reviewers respond to this contextual feature referring to the importance of an up-to-date bibliography. In 70% of the 20 chemistry texts, at least once timeliness appears in close association with the nature of knowledge:

[C#7] The latest references in the book date back to 1985 for the Russian literature and only to 1983 for the international literature; so that the book, due probably to delays in translation, is no longer up-to-date.

Consequently, time alone can be a decisive factor in a negative evaluation due to the characteristic timeliness of knowledge production in chemistry as illustrated by [C#7] above, where the reviewer states that the book is negatively evaluated because the references are outdated. Most BRs bring some reference to time and to how well the book is able to cope with the fast pace of the advances in the discipline.

This temporal aspect seems to be regarded as a very important feature in the harder sciences in general as demonstrated by Haas (1994) in a longitudinal study of the changes verified in one undergraduate student's reading skills, from a superficial reading to a more integral understanding of scientific texts as contextualized and motivated discourse. Among other things, Haas verified that by her senior year of undergraduate biology education, the student's awareness of the importance of recent scientific literature was guiding her choices of what to read for written assignments such as research papers: "First, of course, I see if the titles are relevant...but some of them, like from 1979, well, 1979 isn't that far back, but

they weren't sure then if what they were seeing was true...some of them were really old, like in the 70's [and were] getting me nowhere...so I set the limit of like, maybe, 1980 to the present" (ibid.:65). Thus the student stipulated a range of time within which research articles had to be circumscribed in order to be of any value in her disciplinary field (notice that the opposite may be argued about philology or Bible studies).

In fact, time in chemistry, linguistics, and economics research programs can be said to run differently in view of the different pace of scientific advances. In chemistry, research programs seem to advance quickly in sudden expansions, as can be seen in this reviewer's comments:

[C#11] It is scarcely possible to review the whole of the flood of published work in this field (about 10,000 papers have appeared in three years of research!).

In linguistics, such eagerness to emphasize promptness in references is not as evident and it seems to be common sense that if a book sets a standard, it is only reasonable to expect it to be around *for many years to come*. If we consider that a chemistry book is outdated in three years, the emphasis on time (during which the standard established by the book will prevail) signals a great praise by the reviewer. In [C#34], for example, the reviewer comments on the direction taken by a field that rapidly changes its configuration. In the linguistics texts, however, pressure to change does not appear as a compulsory value.

[C#34] During the last fifteen years an explosion of literature in this field has been observed. In the ... fast growing carbohydrate field, excellent reviews are of great help.

As a result of this individualistic effort to advance the field, expansion of linguistics may be welcomed as a special *tour de force* made by especially endeavoring or outstanding authors.

The relevance that the field assumes in chemistry can be contrasted with the other two areas through a simple frequency test for the word 'field' conducted with the help of the microconcord program. The word 'field' occurs at every 771 words in chemistry, twice as frequently as in linguistics (1,358 words) and more than four times as frequently as in economics (3,249 words). Therefore, chemistry BRs can be said to be 'field-oriented', i.e., the field is specially significant for chemists. This may point to chemists' perception that their field is a well-established culture with a publishing tradition that must be acknowledged when a new book is evaluated.

Linguistics: Clear-Undefined and Testable-Speculative

In linguistics, tacit knowledge⁴ is to a certain extent diffuse and internal disputes are the rule (Harris, 1993). What Becher (1987:273) points out about sociology holds true for linguistics: each argument has to offer "its own persuasive structure", creating an individual perspective of the problem. On the whole, linguists show great concern about discussions over the status of knowledge, and clear and detailed treatment of topics is usually presented as a desirable quality. Expressions such as 'clearly written', 'meaningful', 'coherent', 'theoretically explicit' are used to praise books that 'define concepts' and 'offer definite answers'. On the other hand, terms that emphasize the uncertainty of linguistic approaches are used to express disapprobation:

[L#5]... readers should not expect a completely coherent and definitive statement of what the functional principles are (...)and distinctions between descriptive generalizations and theoretical proposals are not always made clear.

[L#10] His vision of the "assignment" of conceptual elements to various types of display behavior - and ultimately to vocalization - appears to be a fuzzy vision indeed; the model is roughed out, but there is much room left for improvement.

Probably in accordance with the tendency to accept as "true science" those areas of knowledge where the variables studied can be observed (Redman, 1993:118), and also in an attempt to compensate for the indefiniteness in the basic theoretical apparatus of the discipline, reviewers in linguistics adopt a more inductive perspective, using terms for praise and blame that can be placed in a demonstrable-speculative dimension. To credit the content of a book as "testable" is to signal that it is data-oriented, that is, the ideas in it can be substantiated by examples. Its demonstrability accords the book a high value, usually through the use of expressions that relate to a collection of examples: 'sharpens ideas into empirically testable hypotheses', 'cite examples to support point of view', 'examples [extracted] from actual texts', 'data-oriented', 'extraordinary amount of data'.

[L#12] The major strength of D's grammar is his extraordinary attention to detail and the richness of examples...

[L#16] Finally, with the word in a sample sentence or phrase, the student observes how it is used grammatically and contextually (there are almost 50,000 examples!).

Concordances for the word 'example' in the three fields show that linguists view exemplification as an important strategy in evaluation practices much more consistently

(one instance every 492 words) than reviewers in chemistry (819 words) and economics (1,287 words).

To blame, reviewers characterize books with terms that convey a speculative character: ‘authors offer no evidence’, ‘[the book is] speculative in its conclusions’, ‘no empirical basis for claims’, ‘heavily biased’, ‘uneven data’. The linguistics BRs analyzed here mirror a general tendency to seek empirical validation for theories to help delineate the discipline as an objective, scientific field of study.

Evaluation across fields: Deep-Simplistic

As a praising strategy, reviewers in all three fields call attention to the book’s depth in treatment of the main topic. In chemistry, this depth is correspondingly evaluated in terms of its usefulness:

[C#1] This book surprisingly is very good. While most books of this ilk (technology introductions), in their effort to give cursory treatment to many topics, do not have sufficient depth in any topic to be useful, this one provides excellent coverage for chemists or other scientists or technologists not specifically schooled in testing and characterization of polymers. (...)This book has wide appeal, yet depth sufficient to be quite useful.

In linguistics and economics, “in-depth” and “detailed” along with related terms such as “complete” also define those books that bring an authoritative voice in the treatment.

[L#3] This book is a thoroughly researched and thoughtfully prepared account of language development in six young children growing up in Western Samoa.

[E#18]... Bamford’s careful and extremely detailed study does not lend itself to easy and simple conclusions...

Conversely, terms such as “cursory” and “elementary” are used to blame books as not totally “scientific”.

[L#4] This is not the only instance where a complex issue is treated in overly simplified terms in the body of the monograph only to be restated at the end.

[E#13] But the reader in search of serious applied economic analysis and ultimately a convincing and plausible measure of the potential welfare effects of completing the internal market in Europe will find himself or herself greatly disappointed.

It should be expected that evaluations in BRs in these three disciplines go beyond the seven dimensions I defined in the present study. Apparently, characteristics such as stimulating and innovative approaches to issues in linguistics, author’s perceived authority and price of the book in chemistry, and territorial dispute and the book’s pedagogical use in economics are worth a more in-depth analysis than it was possible here.

I consider that there are at least three basic elements underlying my discussion of evaluative dimensions of each field — book, field, and reader. Economics has a clear preference for comments that emphasize the role of the writer and the book in producing knowledge.

[E#8] Despite this, it is an excellent book and should be widely read. It considerably sharpens the debate over free market versus governmental monetary institutions.

[E#9] The book is far too important to end with a critical note. The author knows his subject very well and has the rare gift to present the arguments in a succinct and accessible manner without needing much mathematics.

[E#11] the author succeeds in making good sense of his answer to the puzzle of the 1980s: Why have the dramatic swings in the external value of the dollar had such limited real effects?

While in economics, author and book are presented as the main features responsible for the success of new publications, chemistry texts emphasize the relationship the new book bears with the literary tradition of the discipline, calling attention to the significance of new publications to the field.

[C#3] This work is quite theoretically oriented, as might be expected since Alonso is a theoretical physicist and March is a theoretical chemist. And since the majority of work in this field has been done by physicists, the literature referenced reflects this.

[C#11] The book is aimed particularly at readers who are already working in this field, but it also provides a valuable introduction to the very large and complex body of published work for newcomers to the topic.

[C#15] This has brought added urgency to the task of editing an up-to-date review of the field of anthracyclines, including all aspects from synthesis to clinical application.

In linguistics BRs, the reader receives the main focus of attention in both positive and negative critiques of new publications:

[L#1] Although providing studies in text analysis that may be useful to the ESL composition teacher is a worthy endeavor, this book falls somewhat short of its goal. This is due in part to a less than clear-cut notion of an intended readership.

[L#11] A problem with the essays derives from the fact that they address a broad range of readers, including those who are likely to disagree on fundamentals and those (like myself) who share the same psycholinguistic world view.

The reader is frequently seen as a learner that needs advice and guiding in understanding the information contained in the book:

[L#9] The reader should be advised to consult instead the primary sources or even the secondary sources cited by Doe... Although the author makes a real effort to

guide the reader from point to point, there are many places where we are told too much anecdotal, trivial, or irrelevant information.

[L#12] D's Limbu-English glossary, which spans 145 pages, is equally committed to giving the reader an understanding of the totality of the Limbu experience. D generally succeeds in finding illuminating glosses, and for those culturally bound Limbu lexemes where the English language fails him, he produces hand drawings to help our understanding of these peculiar items of the Limbu environment and culture.

By comparison of the evaluative terms used in each one of the three fields with the help of the microconcord program, some consistent patterns were found. Words such as “book” and “author” in economics, “field” and “references” in chemistry, and “reader” and “examples” in linguistics seem to represent the most characteristic vocabulary in each correspondent field. If they are organized as an analogy in a triangle, it can be suggested that each one of the three disciplines is placed in one of the three vertices in relation to its focus of interest in evaluation:

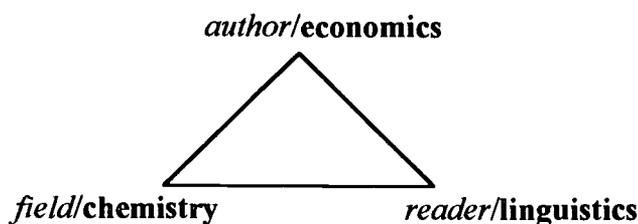


Figure 1 Focus of evaluation per discipline

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Through the analysis developed in the present paper, I have explored connections between text features and the cultural environment in the disciplines. These connections manifested themselves in the distinct ways that reviewers in each of the three fields evaluate books. Differences in the choices of terms of praise and blame employed in linguistics, economics, and chemistry, suggest diverse modes of proposing knowledge.

The ideal of persuasion in economics points toward an emphasis on mathematics (quantification) and method (theoretical principles and empirical evidences) in the study of social science, probably as a way to assure that the discipline will be regarded as “real” science⁵. In chemistry, recency in publication is a decisive criterion of adequacy used by reviewers in producing arguments to praise or blame new publications. Finally, the innovative character of clear and testable approaches constitutes a criterion in linguistics.

The analysis of BRs across fields revealed certain disciplinary consensual goals that characterize disciplinary cultures. Book reviewing as an academic activity seems to take into account specific disciplinary consensual ideals such as ‘clear and testable propositions’ in linguistics, ‘persuasive and attractive rhetoric’ in economics, and ‘comprehensive and recent data’ in chemistry. These ideals impose corresponding demands on reviewers in terms of which values to introduce in producing justificatory arguments for recommending new books, innovations in the current repertory of literary production in the discipline. Around this dynamic socialization between author, publisher, reviewer, and reader, reviewing journals as professional forums offer opportunities for accepted “reason-producing” procedures to be used to create consensus around new materials. Finally, the

very consensual ideals establish the criteria of adequacy to be applied in judging the arguments produced by reviewers to support innovations in the discipline.

The notion of consensual ideals as the force that brings together practitioners belonging to the same discipline is concurrent to the idea of intensity underlying Becher's studies: some disciplines, represented here by chemistry, are more intense in emphasizing the consensual aspect of ideals shared by its members, while others, such as linguistics, allow a broader range of internal controversy⁶. As I attempted to show, different epistemic organizations in chemistry, linguistics and economics, can produce different configurations of text features.

In the present analysis, I explored connections between text features and the cultural environment in the disciplines in terms of the type of information which is considered relevant in specific academic areas. I attempted to show that different epistemic organizations in chemistry, linguistics and economics can produce different configurations of evaluation practices. This study is relevant in that it provides EAP reading and writing instruction with more accurate information on how academic genres perform a given communicative function in specific disciplinary matrices. Still a more in-depth discussion of how we may account for evaluation in text is much needed.

NOTES

1 One differentiation among areas is made by Becher himself when he refers to them with different terms. Physics and sociology are referred to as sciences, one 'pure' and the other 'social'. History, on the other hand, is referred to as 'humanistic study', indicating different positions in the academic spectrum (1987:273). Apparently when the term 'science' is used, it implies the existence of a developed field of academic knowledge with well defined principles ('metaphysical paradigms' and 'exemplars') and well-established nomenclature ('symbolic generalizations'). The same does not seem to apply in the case of the term "study".

2 As seen before, according to Kuhn, a sign of mature science.

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3 John Pencavel, personal communication, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, March, 1994.

4 According to Kuhn (1962:44), tacit knowledge is “knowledge that is acquired through practice and that cannot be articulated explicitly”.

5 In discussing the rhetoric of the human sciences, Rorty (1991:21) argues that there is a tendency, within and outside academy, to think that to be scientific is a matter of being **methodical** (to follow procedures defined in advance). Thus “methodical”, “scientific”, “rational”, and “objective” are commonly used as synonyms.

6 As he rejects traditional views of the division of academia into disciplines defined as more or less scientific, Rorty (1991:40) calls attention to the existence of what I see as a ‘continuum of descent’ along which disciplines occupy positions: ‘If we say that sociology or literary criticism “is not a science”, we shall mean merely that the amount of agreement among sociologists or literary critics on what counts as significant work, work which needs following up, is less than among, say microbiologists’.

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