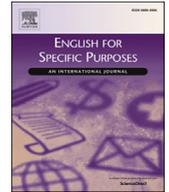


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Expressing criticality in the literature review in research article introductions in applied linguistics and psychology



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ABSTRACT

In order to shed further light on the writing of literature reviews in research-reporting texts and, in particular, writer stance in this type of text, this study examines the expression of criticality in the literature review that occurs in the Introduction sections of academic journal articles in two social science disciplines: applied linguistics and psychology. Using the *social genre/cognitive genre* model of the author to frame the investigation (Bruce, 2008a), the literature reviews that occur in the Introduction sections of 15 academic journal articles from each discipline are examined for ways in which they communicate a critical viewpoint. The findings show systematic use of three generic elements to establish this type of stance: recursive use of content-structuring moves, the metadiscourse device of *attitude markers* and a concessive contrast relation between propositions. There are differences between the two samples in the frequency of occurrence of the latter two elements. Overall, what emerges is that the expression of criticality through the literature reviews of these texts appears to draw upon the discourse competence and specifically the genre knowledge of expert writers.

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1. Introduction

This study investigates the expression of *criticality* in the literature review that occurs in the Introduction section of research-reporting articles published in academic journals. Criticality is defined here as an evaluative judgement made within any field of human activity about some aspect, object or behaviour of that field. The focus of the study is on the organizational and linguistic devices used to express criticality in this type of text.

The idea that, in the literature review sections of research-reporting texts (such as academic journal articles, theses and dissertations), a writer must enact criticality by establishing a personalized, critical voice through the text appears to be a cornerstone value in much of the published 'advice' literature that aims to inform academic and research writing. For example, [Bitchener \(2010\)](#) states "the [literature] review is more than a summary ... it includes a critique that ... assesses or weighs up the value of theories, ideas, claims, research designs, methods or conclusions" (p. 61). Similarly, [Cone and Foster \(1993\)](#) state "you should evaluate the literature critically. Which studies are best and why? Which studies are worst and why?" (p. 112). Also [Paltridge and Starfield \(2007\)](#) assert that "[s]tudents are expected not just to know the literature on their topic, but also to critically evaluate it" (p. 113). However, a number of studies report that novice writers attempting to master the research genres of graduate education (including those for whom English is an additional language) appear to have

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difficulty in establishing a critical stance when writing literature review texts. For example, [Boote and Beile \(2005\)](#) identify, among other problems, a failure to synthesize and critique in the literature reviews of doctoral dissertations. [Casanave and Hubbard \(1992\)](#) highlight problems of dissertation writers in analysing and criticizing ideas (p. 43), and an in-depth case study by [Zhu and Cheng \(2008\)](#) examines the difficulties faced by a non-native speaking doctoral dissertation writer in critically evaluating literature. In relation to the focus of the present study, literature reviews in research articles, [Alton-Lee \(1998\)](#) identified a range of problems from reviewers' comments on submissions to a journal by inexperienced writers, including "the failure by authors to critically interrogate the material they reviewed" (p. 889). Since the research article is an important genre to be mastered by emergent researchers, the study reported here aims to support a pedagogic focus on its literature review and the ways in which criticality is enacted in this type of text.

This section firstly reviews the range theoretical approaches and analytical methods previously employed to examine the expression of criticality in written and spoken texts, most of which adopt a single variable approach. Secondly, as a basis for the present study, this section then argues for a more multi-variable, genre-based approach to operationalizing and describing this construct. The case for a genre-based approach to criticality begins by reviewing existing ESP studies of Introduction sections, focussing particularly on how the literature review is identified. The case then continues in Section 2.2 by presenting the multi-layered *social genre/cognitive* genre model employed as the analytical framework for the present study.

1.1. Defining and investigating criticality

In the extant literature that relates to what is referred to here as criticality, there appears to be little agreement on either terminology or approaches to defining and operationalizing the underlying construct in research. This diversity is evident in several edited collections of studies on the subject (see, for example, [Del Lungo Camiciotti & Tognini-Bonelli, 2003](#); [Hunston & Thompson, 2000](#); [Hyland & Diani, 2009](#); [Salager-Meyer & Lewin, 2011](#)). In one definitional approach, [Biber and Finegan \(1989\)](#) use the term *stance* to describe "lexical and grammatical expressions of attitude towards, feelings, judgement or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message" (p. 93). In another approach, the construct has been referred to as *evaluation* ([Hunston & Thompson, 2000](#)), which may involve judging how positive, certain, expected or important something is. Elsewhere the construct is referred to as *appraisal* ([Martin & White, 2005](#), pp. 43–44), which may involve *affect* (reacting to behaviour), *judgement* (evaluating behaviour) or *appreciation* (evaluating text/process, natural phenomena). Criticality has often been investigated using corpus methods, with studies focussing on a specific linguistic element, such as *evaluative lexis* in the Bank of English Corpus ([Channell, 2000](#)), *adverbial markers* in the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus ([Conrad & Biber, 2000](#)), *grammatical patterns*, such as adjective noun combinations in Cobuild Dictionary definitions ([Hunston & Sinclair, 2000](#)) *reporting verbs* in a sample of book review articles ([Diani, 2008](#)) and *metadiscourse devices*, also in a sample of book review articles ([Tse & Hyland, 2008](#)). Other have involved manual analysis of smaller samples of texts, such as *clause relations* in the writing of Noam Chomsky ([Hoey, 2000](#)), and *narrative structure* ([Cortazzi & Jin, 2000](#)) using an illustrative text.

In relation to the investigation of criticality in research-reporting texts, there is a similar diversity in both defining and investigating the construct. For example [Dressen \(2003\)](#) combines ethnography and quantitative analysis of a range of linguistic elements when examining the construction of evidence by geologists in the *field account* that occurs in results sections of research articles. [Stotesbury \(2003\)](#) undertook an interdisciplinary study of research article abstracts involving manual analysis of the rhetorical staging and supporting linguistic elements, and [Tucker \(2003\)](#) examined the expression of evaluation in art history articles using systemic functional grammar, focussing mainly on *attitudinal* verbs. Using corpus methods, [Charles \(2006\)](#) examined reporting verbs and 'that' clauses in doctoral theses. Studies that have examined aspects of criticality in the Introduction sections of research articles, the sub-genre that is the focus of the present study, include those of [Shaw \(2003\)](#) and [Kwan, Chan, and Lam \(2012\)](#). [Shaw \(2003\)](#) used [Hunston's \(2000\)](#) category of two areas of evaluation (interactive plane and autonomous plane) to compare Introduction sections in economics articles by Danish and English writers. [Kwan et al. \(2012\)](#) investigated texts from the discipline of *Information Systems* identifying what they termed *strategies* used by writers to enact criticality in relation to epistemological elements.

What previous studies of criticality collectively appear to reveal about its expression is the involvement of different knowledge elements (lexical, syntactical and text-structuring), operating at different textual and discursive levels, elements that either relate to the content of a text (propositional knowledge) or that are involved in communicating more directly the writer's view to the reader (metadiscourse knowledge). Therefore, in order to account for several knowledge elements interacting across different textual levels, the present study employs a multiple-layer, genre-based approach to investigate the communication of criticality. Employing genre as an integrative, analytical approach to this type of research is justified in terms of [Bhatia's \(2002, 2004\)](#) proposal that discourse includes social practice, genre and text. The social genre/cognitive genre model employed here aims to operationalize the underlying constructs relating to genre and text. Also, as [Hyland \(2005a, p. 190\)](#) suggests, a genre-based study may be able to provide fine-grained detail about different ways of communicating criticality, and also indicate how and where they are likely to cluster within a genre's conventionalized rhetorical framework.

In foundational research of the sub-genre of the research article Introduction section, [Swales \(1990, 2004\)](#) proposed the well-known CARS (create a research space), three-move pattern for the organization of the content of the Introduction section of research articles by: establishing the research territory (Move 1), establishing the niche or gap (Move 2) and occupying the niche (Move 3). Move 3 includes the possible sub-moves of 3(a) outlining the purposes of the research, 3(b)

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