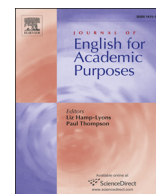




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A genre-based investigation of applied linguistics book reviews in English and Brazilian Portuguese



Luciana Junqueira*

Georgia State University, 34 Peachtree St., Suite 1200, One Park Tower Building, Atlanta, GA 30303, USA

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This genre-based study examined cross-cultural rhetorical patterns of academic applied linguistics book reviews in English and Brazilian Portuguese (BP). It explored how this genre is contextualized in a Brazilian and in an English-medium journal, following a move-analysis approach. The findings revealed that the academic book reviews largely followed the moves first identified by [Motta-Roth \(1998\)](#), with the exception of evaluative Move 3. This move, unlike the linear sequence previously proposed, was found to be predominantly cyclical. Further, the book reviews in English appeared to be more critical than the BP ones. The English book reviews recommended the books only after indicating potential shortcomings whereas the majority of book reviews in BP recommended the book without mentioning caveats. The BP book reviews also seem to point to an ‘avoidance of conflict’ found in other genres in BP, such as research articles. Finally, the BP book reviews displayed considerably more variation than the English counterparts, which may suggest that while this genre is well established in the discourse community in the English-medium journal, it might still be emerging in the Brazilian context. Explanations are offered to account for cross-cultural differences.

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1. Introduction

Book reviews enact various functions in academia, such as introducing new books to a given discipline and assessing “how valuable their contribution may be to the development of the field” ([Suárez & Moreno, 2008](#), p. 147). In this context, the academic book review genre¹ plays a particularly important role as a vehicle for publication and visibility for graduate students and novice scholars as one of the first genres they attempt to independently produce and publish ([Hyland, 2000](#); [Motta-Roth, 2001](#)). Thus, studies that investigate different cultural and genre patterns of book reviews might be especially helpful to novice researchers whose first language is not English and who would like to attempt to participate in the academic discourses of their fields in international contexts. As [Swales and Feak \(2004\)](#) explain, because of the public and evaluative nature of book reviews, writers “must exercise discretion” and “should very carefully consider their broader journal audience, purpose, and strategy so as to display familiarity with the field, expertise, and intelligence” (p. 182).

Nonetheless, despite the different purposes of book reviews for the academic community, this genre was neglected for a long time in applied linguistics research ([Hyland, 2000](#)). It was not until the past decade that works have begun to be

* Tel.: +1 404 413 5200; fax: +1 404 413 5201.

E-mail addresses: ljunqueira1@gsu.edu, lucyjunqueira@yahoo.com.br, lucianafindlay@gmail.com.

¹ The term “genre” is used here according to [Swales’ \(1990\)](#) definition of “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” and whose exemplars “exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience” (p. 58).

published on the rhetorical patterns of book reviews (e.g., Carvalho, 2001, 2002; Moreno & Suárez, 2009; Motta-Roth, 1998; Suárez & Moreno, 2008) as well as other linguistic features, such as praise and criticism (e.g., Hyland, 2000), evaluative meaning (e.g., Römer, 2005, 2008), critical attitudes (e.g., Giannoni, 2006; Moreno & Suárez, 2008, 2009), reporting and evaluation verbs (e.g., Diani, 2009), and rhetorical identity (e.g., Tse & Hyland, 2009).

Motta-Roth (1998) was the first scholar to identify the rhetorical moves of book reviews written in English. She followed the move-analysis approach developed by Swales (1990) for the analyses of rhetorical organization of texts from different genres. Motta-Roth's (1998) study of 180 academic book reviews written in English across three disciplines (i.e., chemistry, economics, and linguistics) revealed that the book review genre is normally organized in predictable moves and steps (or sub-functions), which were easily recognizable in the three distinct fields studied. According to the rhetorical patterns she identified, a typical book review comprises four moves: (1) Introducing the book, (2) Outlining the book, (3) Highlighting parts of the book, and (4) Providing closing evaluation of the book. The steps within the moves are not always obligatory and perform more specific rhetorical functions in relation to the more general purposes of the moves (see Table 1 below).

Since Motta-Roth's (1998) work on academic book reviews, other scholars have researched the rhetorical patterns of book reviews in different disciplines and languages (e.g. Bezerra, 2002; Carvalho, 2001, 2002; Nicolaisen, 2002; Suárez & Moreno, 2008). Most of these studies have generally corroborated the rhetorical organization of book reviews regarding the moves identified by Motta-Roth (1998), although with important cross-cultural variation. For example, differences in moves were identified in Suárez and Moreno (2008), and their analyses revealed that Spanish literary book reviews tend to use more descriptive moves than their English counterparts and that Spanish reviewers evaluated the books in a more sympathetic way than the authors writing in English.

Consistent differences in terms of steps have also been reported (e.g., Carvalho, 2001, 2002; Suárez & Moreno, 2008). For instance, in Suárez and Moreno's (2008) comparison of literary book reviews in English and Spanish, the authors found new steps in the Spanish book reviews. They then posited that such discrepancies "help to confirm the consideration of the academic book review as a distinct genre across the two language cultures" (p. 163).

These findings parallel research carried out on research articles using Swales' (1990) CARS model (Creating a Research Space), in which studies have generally supported the moves proposed in the model, but with varying steps and/or moves modifications suggested according to different contexts (Hirano, 2009). To illustrate, in a cross-cultural investigation of research article introductions (RAIs) written in Brazilian Portuguese and English, Hirano (2009) found that the RAIs written in BP tended to lack Move 2 (i.e., "Establishing a niche"), which is an obligatory move in Swales' CARS model.

This type of cross-cultural research has begun to shed light on how academic genres are realized in different languages and contexts. However, research investigating cross-cultural differences in the academic book review genre remains scarce. Only the previously mentioned works of Carvalho (2001), Suárez and Moreno (2008), and Moreno and Suárez (2009) have investigated cross-cultural rhetorical patterns of academic book reviews, and these works have focused on literary theory fields. Additionally, Carvalho's (2001) corpus consisted of reviews from the 1990s, and as Moreno and Suárez (2008) pointedly argue, "the temporal factor has been proven to affect the rhetorical and textual configuration of this genre [academic book review] in various ways, which highlights the dynamism of writing cultures" (p. 755). Based on their rhetorical analyses of literary theory book reviews, Suárez and Moreno (2008) also call for more research on book reviews from other disciplines in order to investigate whether their findings would be corroborated in different writing cultures.

In this context, the aim of the present study was to explore the generic structure of academic applied linguistics book reviews in English and Brazilian Portuguese (BP) from a cross-cultural perspective, and thus contribute to our knowledge of how this genre is enacted in different languages and discourse communities.

Table 1
Rhetorical moves and steps in book reviews

Move 1: introducing the book	Step 1: Defining the general topic of the book and/or Step 2: Informing about potential readership and/or Step 3: Informing about the author and/or Step 4: Making topic generalizations and/or Step 5: Inserting book in the field
Move 2: outlining the book	Step 6: Providing general view of the organization of the book and/or Step 7: Stating the topic of each chapter and/or Step 8: Citing extra-text material
Move 3: highlighting parts of the book	Step 9: Providing focused evaluation
Move 4: providing closing evaluation of the book	Step10A: Definitely recommending/disqualifying the book or Step10B: Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings

Adapted from Motta-Roth, 1995, p. 242.

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