

li104

Linguistic Insights  
Studies in Language and Communication

Françoise Salager-Meyer &  
Beverly A. Lewin (eds)

# Crossed Words: Criticism in Scholarly Writing

Offprint

Peter Lang

**Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at (<http://dnb.d-nb.de>).

British Library and Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:  
A catalogue record for this book is available from *The British Library*,  
Great Britain.

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Crossed words : criticism in scholarly writing / Françoise Salager-Meyer & Beverly A. Lewin (eds).  
p. cm. – (Linguistic insights : studies in language and communication; v. 104)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-3-0343-0049-0

1. Academic writing. 2. Discourse analysis. I. Salager-Meyer, Françoise. II. Lewin, Beverly A.  
P301.5.A27C76 2011  
401'.47–dc23

2011028440

THE PUBLICATIONS FINANCED BY THE SCIENTIFIC, HUMANISTIC , TECHNOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ANDES (CDCHTA, MÉRIDA, VENEZUELA) ALL GO THROUGH A STRICT REVIEWING PROCESS CONDUCTED BY EXPERTS IN THE DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES. THIS BOOK HAS BEEN PARTIALLY FINANCED THROUGH THE PROJECT PL-M-01-10-07 CORRESPONDING TO THE 2010 PUBLICATION PROGRAM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ANDES SCIENTIFIC, HUMANISTIC, TECHNOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH COUNCIL.

ISSN 1424-8689

ISBN 978-3-0343-0049-0

© Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, Bern 2011  
Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland  
[info@peterlang.com](mailto:info@peterlang.com), [www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com), [www.peterlang.net](http://www.peterlang.net)

All rights reserved.

All parts of this publication are protected by copyright.

Any utilisation outside the strict limits of the copyright law, without the permission of the publisher, is forbidden and liable to prosecution.

This applies in particular to reproductions, translations, microfilming, and storage and processing in electronic retrieval systems.

Printed in Germany

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	9
------------------------	---

FRANÇOISE SALAGER-MEYER / BEVERLY A. LEWIN

Introduction .....	11
--------------------	----

## *Method of Analysis*

FEDERICO NAVARRO

The Critical Act as a Pragmatic Unit for Studying

Academic Conflict: A Methodological Framework .....	23
---	----

## *Genre Research*

ESMAT BABAI

Hard Science, Hard Talk? The Study of Negative Comments

in Physics Book Reviews.....	55
------------------------------	----

DAVIDE SIMONE GIANNONI

‘Don’t be stupid about intelligent design’:

Confrontational Impoliteness in Medical Journal Editorials .....	79
--	----

DIMITRA KOUTSANTONI 'I felt that the proposal had some promise, but was hampered by lack of specificity [...]': Personal Attribution and Mitigation in Grant Proposals Peer review Reports .....	99
BEVERLY A. LEWIN / HADARA PERPIGNAN Mind the Gap: Criticism in Literary Criticism .....	127
SEYYED-ABDOLHAMID MIRHOSSEINI Who Accepts? Who Rejects? The Case of a Rejected Paper in Applied Linguistics .....	153
FRANÇOISE SALAGER-MEYER / MARÍA ÁNGELES ALCARAZ ARIZA Expert Knowledge-Holders, Knowledge-Builders and Factual Reporters: Critical Voices in Medical Genres.....	173

*Intercultural/Cross-Linguistic Research*

ZOFIA GOLEBIOWSKI Scholarly Criticism Across Discourse Communities.....	203
ANA I. MORENO FERNÁNDEZ / LORENA SUÁREZ Academic Book Reviews of Literature in English and Spanish: Writers' Visibility and Invisibility Strategies for Expressing Critical Comments.....	225

## *Cross-Disciplinary Research*

TRINE DAHL / KJERSTI FLØTTUM

Wrong or Just Different? How Existing Knowledge  
is Staged to Promote New Claims in English Economics  
and Linguistics Articles ..... 259

PHUONG DZUNG PHO / SIMON MUSGRAVE / JULIE BRADSHAW

Establishing a Niche in Applied Linguistics  
and Educational Technology Research Articles ..... 283

## *Diachronic Research*

BOJANA PETRIĆ

Scholarly Criticism in a Small Academic Community:  
A Diachronic Study of Book Reviews  
in the Oldest Serbian Scholarly Journal..... 309

OLIVIA FONG-WA HA

A Diachronic Study of Music Criticism:  
The Case of Record Reviews..... 339

Notes on Contributors..... 365

# Expert Knowledge-Holders, Knowledge-Builders and Factual Reporters: Critical Voices in Medical Genres

## 1. Introduction

The rhetoric of science is a well-established discipline in the international research community, especially among applied linguists interested in scientific discourse. Within that discipline there is a strong tradition of studying the relation between the dominant goal of science – the quest for unbiased “truth” – and how such truth is established. The discipline is also concerned with how the truth of scientific utterances is accepted and established as a fact by the scientific community.

The study of the rhetoric of science is thus concerned with persuasive communication and the relation between text and power. To have power in the scientific community is not only to be able to persuade the community of the correctness or probability of one’s own truth claims, but also to be able to refute peers’ claims with robust, well-founded arguments. Indeed, the rhetoric of science is essentially discussion-oriented, i.e., *dialogical*, in the sense that the quest for the unbiased “truth” referred to above demands a consequent skepticism towards established truths<sup>1</sup>.

A classical example is found in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, a work that is both a reply to and an attack on Plato’s refusal to consider rhetoric as a relevant and decent tool for the quest for knowledge. In Aristotle’s parlance: “Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic [...] for, to a

---

1 These established truths are formulated most prominently by Karl Popper’s *falsification* principle that states that every genuine test of a scientific theory is an attempt to refute or falsify it.

certain extent, all men attempt to discuss statements and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to *attack* others”.

This “attacking others” is a constitutive element of social interaction, hence, of any kind of discourse, whether scientific or literary, oral or written. In scientific discourse analysis, this element has been called “professional conflict/disagreement” (Hunston 1993), “negative criticism” (Bloch 2003), “negational citations” (Harwood 2008), among others. Throughout this chapter, we will refer to it simply as “criticism”.

Applied linguists, historians of science, philosophers, LSP practitioners and sociologists have examined the socio-pragmatic phenomenon of (academic) criticism from a number of different perspectives. Myers (1989), Swales (1990), Belcher (1995), Swales/Feak (1995), Schramm (1996) and Kourilova (1994, 1996) all addressed the problem of criticism in research papers from a general angle and argue not only that blunt criticism in print is usually avoided but that critically attacking others in contemporary science is one of the most sensitive issues in the use of source texts. Their research also indicates that when challenging previously published research findings, epistemic modality or other subtle hedging strategies are used abundantly.

Other researchers have more recently dealt with the cross-disciplinary aspect of academic criticism, the two most frequently cited studies in that respect being Motta-Roth’s (1998) and Hyland’s (2000). The former examined the realization of conflict in book reviews in chemistry, economics and linguistics, and the latter analyzed speech acts encoding praise and criticism in book reviews from the so-called soft and hard sciences. Their research interestingly shows that the linguistic formulation of criticism varies both qualitatively and quantitatively not only between the hard and soft sciences, but also within these branches of science themselves.

Nguyen (1988), Do (1989), Taylor/Chen (1991), Bloch/Chi (1995) and Farrell (1997) adopted a cross-linguistic/cross-cultural perspective of criticism. They indeed compared the linguistic formulation of criticism between Asian and Anglo-American scientific writings and were able to demonstrate that Asian academics can and do take critical positions, though not necessarily as often and not in the same way as Anglo-American scientists do. Moreno/Suárez (2008), for their part, analyzed the frequency and linguistic formulation of

positive and negative appraisals in English and Spanish literary book reviews and found that the relative frequency of criticism is much higher in the English corpus than it is in its Spanish counterpart.

We should also mention the work of those who have focused their attention either on the diachronic or on the cross-cultural aspect of criticism (Salager-Meyer 2001; Salager-Meyer/Zambrano 2001; Salager-Meyer/Alcaraz Ariza 2004; Salager-Meyer *et al.* 2003) by comparing the evolution of the frequency and verbalization of criticism in Spanish, French and English 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century medical discourse. That research clearly indicates that, regardless of their native language, 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists used to convey their criticisms in a much more aggressive and personal manner than today's scientists do. However, since the 1930's, Anglo-American researchers started expressing their dissension in a much more subtle and hedgy way, whereas their French and Spanish counterparts remained quite harsh, overt and personal when disagreeing with their peers, at least up to the beginning of the 1990's.

Although written prose is undoubtedly the main focus of the above-mentioned research on academic criticism, oral discourse has also been dealt with, especially in the field of business (Ehlich/Wagner 1995; Firth 1995) and the health sciences (e.g., Candlin/Lucas 1986; Candlin 2001). It is finally interesting to note that the theme of the Second CERLIS (*Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici*) Conference, held in Bergamo (Italy) in October 2001, was entirely devoted to the study of conflict and negotiation in specialized texts (scientific/academic, political, legal, economic and business communication) written in the main European languages, viz., English, French, German, Italian and Spanish (cf. Gotti *et al.* 2002).

Why so much interest lately in the study of conflict and its negotiation? Gianonni (2002) argues that it can be accounted for by two factors, viz., 1) conflict acts both on the semantic plane (whenever a statement/finding/paper attracts disagreement or criticism) and on the interpersonal plane because of the pragmatic implications of critical statements voiced in print, and 2) conflict and its negotiation are prominent features of specialized discourse.

As can be seen, then, the issue of academic criticism has been addressed from a number of different perspectives that have un-

doubtedly shed very interesting light on our understanding of that socio-pragmatic phenomenon. But, as Hyland (2000: 45) expressed, “there is little work on how the expression of criticism may vary in particular *genres* and contexts [...]. Our knowledge of how criticism is expressed is likewise very limited”.

Hyland is not the only one who advocates for more studies on academic criticism conducted from a generic standpoint. Paltridge also argues that a thorough and balanced approach to the issue of conflict in academic prose should also involve examining how scientists express their criticisms in “the context of *particular genres*” (Paltridge 1997: 102-103).

This is why we decided to launch a research project on the cross-generic and cross-linguistic features of criticism by examining its frequency and linguistic realization across different genre-systems<sup>2</sup>. Partial results have already been published regarding Spanish (Alcaraz Ariza/Salager-Meyer 2002, 2003; Salager-Meyer/Alcaraz Ariza 2004) and English medical discourse (Salager-Meyer 2001, 2010). However insightful that research is, it mostly reports *qualitative* findings. This chapter is thus a quantitative follow up of the above-mentioned studies in the sense that it examines the frequency of a certain number of criticism-related variables in the six most important genres of medical discourse (cf. Webber 1994; Giannoni 2008), viz., Editorials, Review Articles, Research Papers, Case Reports, Book Reviews, and Letters to the Editor.

## 2. Purpose

A definition of ‘criticism’ is in order here. A ‘criticism’ is to be understood as a statement that reflects a discrepancy between the stance of a

---

2 There are academic genres, such as textbooks, research articles, Letters to the Editor, essays and examination questions that are common to most disciplines. Some fields, though, have typical genres or “*genre systems*” (Bazerman/Paradis 1991); in law cases, statutes and judgments; in business letters, business reports and memos (Bhatia 2002).

writer and that of another scientist or research team (examples 1, 2 and 3 below)<sup>3</sup> or that held by the scientific community at large (example 4).

- (1) While Pryse-Phillips accepted unquestionably that his patients were hallucinating, it is not clear whether the syndrome is an hallucinatory or a desillusional disorder or both. (Editorial).
- (2) I have studied this field for a number of years from a far distant vantage point. My opinions in this subject are mostly in agreement with Keen and Keen. However, the situation is far more scientifically complex and politically charged than as they describe [sic]. (Letter to the Editor).
- (3) These recent formulas (\*) have limited clinical use. (Research Paper).
- (4) Most beliefs about estrogen deficiency as a cause of cardiovascular or neurological disease [...] are based on prospective and retrospective cohort studies and case-control studies which are too frequently susceptible to a “healthy user” bias. (Book Review).

The cross-generic research reported here aims at determining:

- 1) the overall frequency of criticism in the six main genres of medical discourse we refer to above,
- 2) the frequency of overt vs. covert criticism. By *overt* criticism we mean a direct/unhedged criticism (ex. 1 to 4 above), and by *covert* we mean a criticism hedged by means of epistemic devices (examples 5-6) or by the “responsibility-shifting” strategy (Salager-Meyer 2001) whereby an inanimate entity (e.g., a result, a conclusion) stands for the authors of a study (example 7):
- (5) Many of these series *seem rather* outdated. (Book Review).
- (6) This led to much confusion because it *appears* that the authors' results are the opposite of what they actually are. (Letter to the Editor).
- (7) Our findings do not support the conclusions of previous research (\*) according to which [...]. (Research Paper).

---

3 All the examples provided are drawn from our sample texts. The asterisks stand for superscripted numbers that, in the original article, refer the reader to an end-list of bibliographical references.

- 3) the frequency of personal vs. impersonal criticism in each genre, a *personal* criticism being that voiced at researchers who are clearly identified in the paper itself (examples 1-2 above), i.e., not in the bibliographical references only. This is what Swales refers to as “integral citation” (1990) that indicates the authors’ names. By contrast, an *impersonal* criticism is targeted at a research team or a researcher who is referred to by a superscript number (ex. 3) – what Swales (1990) labeled “non-integral citations” – or to the scientific community at large (example 4).
  - 4) the frequency of the different targets of criticisms in each genre. By “target” we mean the entity or person towards which the criticism is voiced (e.g., the content of a book, a book author, a named or unnamed research team, the methods/results/conclusions of a research article, etc). A gap in the literature was considered as a criticism voiced at the scientific community at large (example 8):
- (8) Although demographic features of patients with adenocarcinoma are becoming clearer, unfortunately risk factors for this disease are not yet well defined. (Research Paper).

The quantitative results obtained will be analyzed from a socio-pragmatic dimension that will relate the frequency, surface patterning and targets of criticism to the communicative function of each genre and to the rank/status/power relations that exist between the encoders of each genre and their audience/readership.

### 3. Materials and methods

The material selected consists in 93 articles distributed as follows: 10 Editorials, 10 Review Articles, 10 Research Papers, 10 Case Reports, 19 Book Reviews and 34 Letters to the Editor making up a total of 106,423 running words (see Table 1). These articles, all published between 1990

and 2008 and written in English by native English-speaking scientists<sup>4</sup>, are public and primary insofar as they all belong to the expert-to-expert axis of academic communication. The source journals were leading peer-reviewed generalist rather than specialist medical periodicals: *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, *The British Medical Journal* and *The Lancet*.

Each paper was used in its entirety as our basic unit of analysis. The 93 texts were scanned manually to locate patterns that implied a critical stance on the writer's part<sup>5</sup>. All instances of criticisms were recorded in each paper and the totals were computed per genre. Because there is great variability with respect to the total number of running words making up each genre (see Table 1), the frequency of criticism was normalized per 10,000 words in each genre (cf. Biber/Finegan 1989). The quantitative data thus obtained were contrasted by means of Chi-square tests for contingency tables to determine whether statistically significant cross-generic differences were observed. Alpha value was set at  $p < .05$ .

The criticisms recorded were then classified into "overt" vs. "covert" and "personal" vs. "impersonal". The frequency of each category was calculated per genre, and the results were also compared by means of chi square tests. The targets of criticisms were counted per genre, and the frequency of each target category was calculated over the total number of criticisms recorded in each genre.

We believe that the analytical (text-based) procedure adopted in this chapter provides a thicker description of criticism across typical

---

4 Native English writer status was assessed on the basis of the writers' last name and of their institutional affiliation (especially the address of the first named author). Whenever it was possible (i.e., when the e-mail address of the first author was provided), we contacted the writers in order to enquire about their native language. We could contact the authors of 42 papers who all confirmed their "native English-speaker status".

5 As Alcaraz Ariza (2009) rightly remarks, evaluative acts are not always easy to identify. On the one hand, evaluation is very often characterized by its implicit nature and, on the other hand, it is not always encoded by lexicogrammatical means. Hence, if we want to identify the evaluative (positive as well as negative) remarks contained in a corpus, we need to take the *context* into account. In other words, the identification of criticism has been here inferred from a pragmatic point of view.

genres of medical discourse. As a response to the subjectivity problem often raised in such text-based studies and in order to validate our interpretation and enhance the internal validity of our research, we held informal discussions with two full-fledged English-speaking medical researchers whenever we had a doubt with respect to text, criticism and target of criticism classification. One specialist informant also recorded and classified instances of criticisms in a sample of ten medical papers. The data we recorded in these ten sample texts were compared with his; inter-rater reliability was .84.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Frequency of criticism

Table 1 shows that 445 criticisms were recorded in the whole corpus.

	BR	LE	ED	RV	RP	CR	Total
N° words	10,207	10,075	10,958	36,558	23,538	15,087	106,423
N° criticism	121	103	46	148	20	7	445
Criticism per 10,000 words	118.5	102.2	42	40.5	8.5	4.6	



+  
Most  
critical
-  
Least  
critical

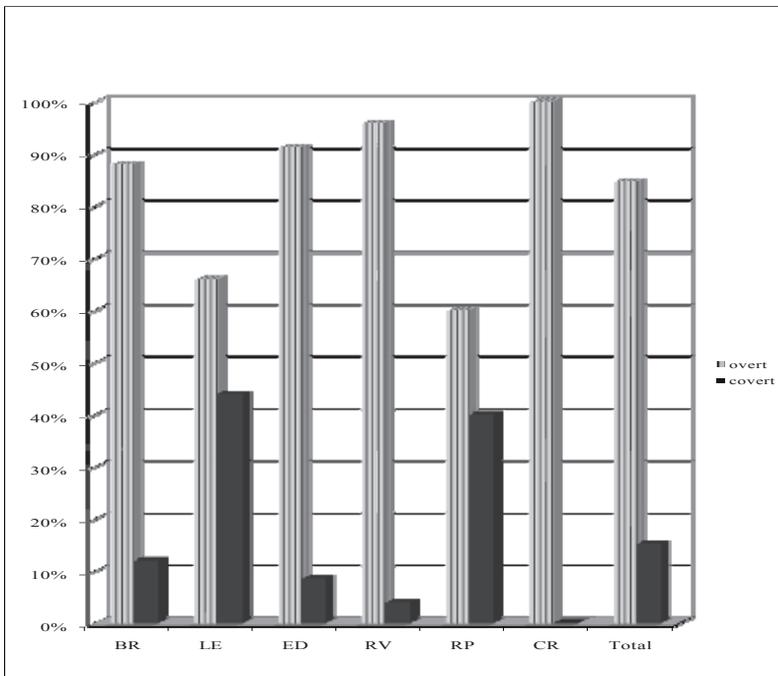
Table 1. Corpus size and summary of quantitative results.

It also displays the normalized data regarding the frequency of criticism per 10,000 running words in each genre. It can readily be seen that the 93 texts examined can be classified into three groups according to their respective frequency of criticism. Indeed, at one extreme we find highly critical genres (Book Reviews and Letters to the Editor) with a criticism frequency greater than 100 per 10,000 words, and, at the other, we find low-criticism genres (Research Papers and Case Reports) with a criticism frequency between 4 and 8 per 10,000 words. In mid-position, we

have moderately critical genres (Editorials and Review Articles) with a criticism frequency of about 40 per 10,000 words.

#### 4.2. Overt vs. covert criticism

Graph 1 indicates that of the 445 critical speech acts recorded, 377 (84.7%) are overtly voiced, and 68 (15.3%) are covertly expressed, the difference between these two frequencies being highly significant ( $p = .0001$ ).

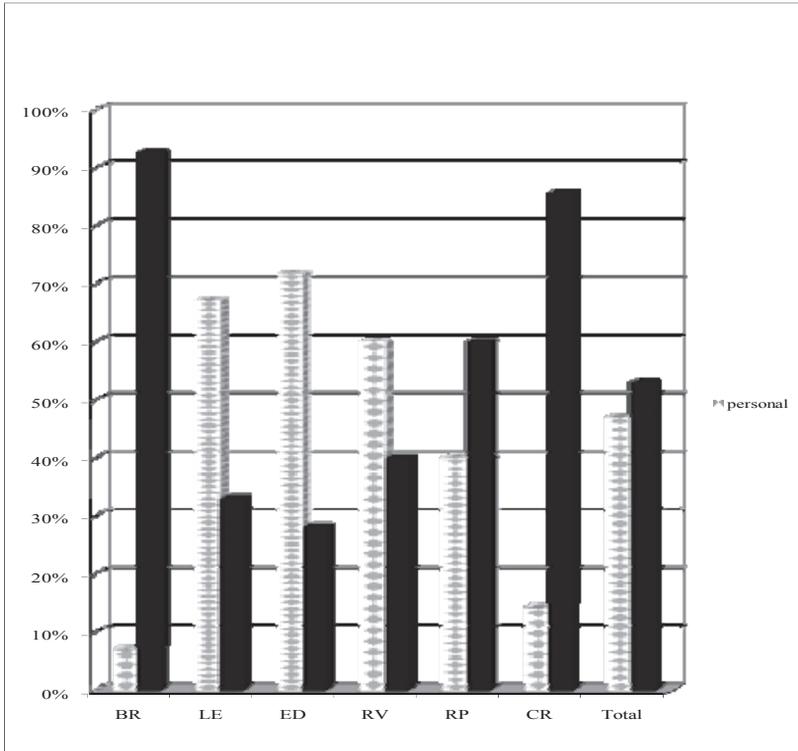


Graph 1. Frequency of overt vs. covert criticism per genre.

It can also be seen that in the six genres overt criticisms *significantly* outweigh their covert counterparts ( $p = .0001$ ), except in Letters to the Editor and Research Papers where, albeit overt criticisms do outnumber covert ones, the difference between the two categories of criticism is not statistically significant.

### 4.3. Personal vs. impersonal

Graph 2 shows that, although the *overall* frequency of impersonal criticism (53%) is greater than that of personal criticism (47%), the difference between the two categories of criticism is not statistically significant.

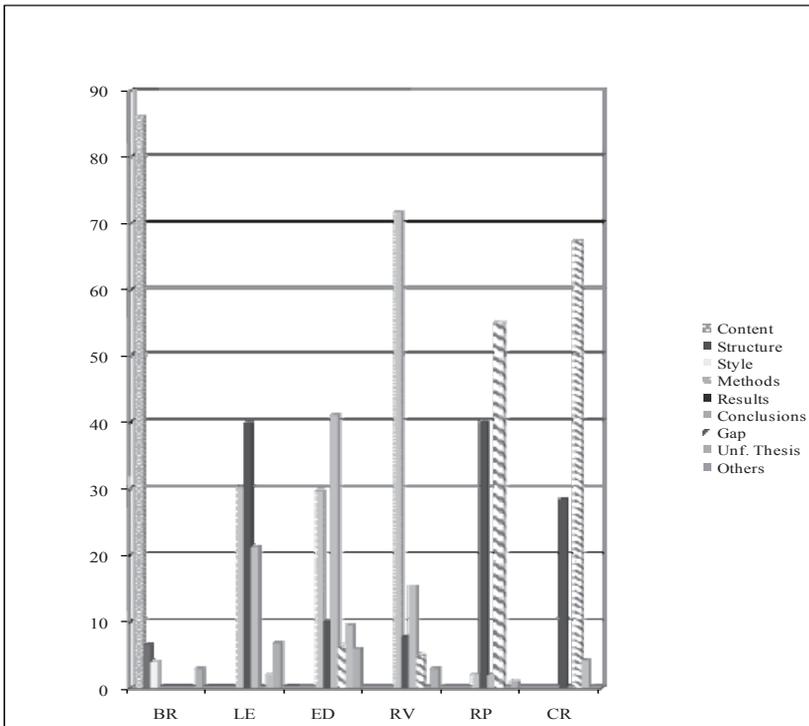


Graph 2. Frequency of personal vs. impersonal criticism per genre.

However, interesting cross-generic differences can be observed. Impersonal criticisms indeed significantly outnumber personal ones in Book Reviews, Case Reports ( $p = .0001$ ) and, to a lesser extent, in Research Papers ( $p = .045$ ), whereas personal criticisms significantly outweigh impersonal ones in Letters to the Editor ( $p = .0007$ ), Editorials ( $p = .0001$ ) and, to a lesser extent, in Review Articles ( $p = .045$ ).

#### 4.4. Targets of criticism

Graph 3 indicates that the six medical genres analyzed here can be classified into three distinct “target groups”.



Graph 3. Targets of criticism per medical genre.

Book Reviews clearly stand as a “lone rider” by being the only medical genre that, quite logically, overwhelmingly voices its criticism at the book content. The second group is formed by Letters to the Editor, Editorials and Review Articles that mainly criticize the fundamental phases of experimental scientific research, what Horton (1995: 986) refers to as “the archeology of arguments”, i.e., the results, methods and/or conclusions of previously published research. Within this group, it is interesting to observe that over 70% of the criticisms rec-



We will now explain these quantitative findings in the light of the communicative function of each genre and of the social role assumed by their respective encoders.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. *Highly critical group: researcher-centered, highly subjective and evaluative/argumentative genres (Book Reviews and Letters to the Editor)*

To start with, it is important to mention that Book Reviews are generally written by specialists who have been solicited by journal editors. Book reviewers thus speak as expert knowledge-holders who present their critical appraisal of the book reviewed. This is why from a pragmatic standpoint Book Reviews must be regarded as the most face-threatening genre since they essentially involve the assessment of a colleague's *book*. Our findings regarding the very high frequency of overt criticism in Book Reviews thus corroborate those of previous studies that have evinced that *outright* (i.e., overt) criticism is an integral feature of Book Reviews (Salager-Meyer 2010) and that conflict, as Giannoni so nicely expresses, "is the common thread that holds this genre together" (2002: 356). What is more, the recent advent of the so-called book-note in biomedical journals<sup>6</sup> with its obligatory "Limi-

---

6 A few years ago, medical journals such as *Annals of Internal Medicine* started publishing "structured book reviews" (in opposition to "narrative book reviews") which remind us, on the one hand, of the so-called structured abstract imposed upon medical researchers by the editors of the most prestigious medical journals and, on the other, of the plea from medical editors themselves for a "structured discussion" for research papers (Smith 1999; Clarke *et al.* 2002). Such Book Reviews, called Book Notes, are "structured abstracts of information on newly published books". They contain nine obligatory moves, among them a "limitation" one that precisely indicates the conceptual and textual flaws of the book under review.

tations” move is a clear reflection of the fact that criticism is a necessary rhetorical feature of the Book Review cognitive structure.

Unlike Book Reviews, Letters to the Editor are not solicited but, like Book Reviews, they offer concise and varied examples of critically evaluative rhetoric and language (Bloch 2003: 350). As a matter of fact, Letters to the Editor were found to be the second most critical genre. This is due to the fact that Letters to the Editor witness interpersonal conflicts, tension and competition within the scientific community that are generally hidden or ignored in finding-oriented genres such as Research Papers and Case Reports (see 4.3 below). Indeed, Letters to the Editor generally contest published results and deal with “hot”/polemical issues in a controversial tone. These open letters, whose main illocutionary acts are “constructive contradiction/paradigm refutation” (Carnet/Magnet 2002: 92; Magnet/Carnet 2006: 179), are a form of discourse situated between the written and the oral modes of discourse where underlying conflicts are generally made quite explicit (ex. 9 to 11):

- (9) Scuklenk is wrong in stating that the price of Glaxo-Wellcome demands for zidovudine is too high for South Africa to treat pregnant women infected with HIV [...]. The argument that South Africa cannot afford this reduced cost is non-sensical.
- (10) We wholeheartedly agree with Hampton’s statement that cooperation and understanding between primary and secondary care are crucial. Unfortunately, his article has done little to promote these.
- (11) In his editorial on genetically modified foods *Dixon* eschews certain important issues. Firstly, he does not point out that [...] food production is not the problem. Secondly, he dismisses the campaigners who draw parallels between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and genetically modified food.

As can be seen from examples 9 to 11 above, criticisms in Letters to the Editor are formulated in a straightforward and strongly subjective fashion, sometimes in a downgrading and harshly polemical tone. By allowing researchers to swiftly, personally and contentiously react to issues with which they feel directly concerned and by questioning previously validated research, Letters to the Editor frequently constitute the first step towards protocol questioning and paradigmatic shift.

As Magnet/Carnet (2006) posit, the most interesting role of Letters to the Editor lies in the fact that they provide researchers with an outlet for frustrations, oppositions, controversies and disagreements that cannot be given vent in the more rigid, impersonal and formal Research Paper and Review Article genres.

It is interesting to observe that, as far as the expression of criticism is concerned, these two highly critical and subjective researcher-centered genres differ in one respect. Indeed, personal criticisms are significantly more frequent in Letters to the Editor than they are in Book Reviews. This difference lies in the fact that in today's Book Reviews, it is an *object* (the book or a book chapter, not the book author) that is held responsible for the flaws mentioned in the Book Reviews. Indeed, in today's Book Reviews, as examples 12 and 13 below illustrate – contrary to what was observed in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Book Reviews (Salager-Meyer 2010) – it is the book that “*fails to*”, “*lacks*”, etc.:

- (12) The book also lacks any comment on the occurrence of Parkinson's disease in young adults, and fails to mention the genomic impact of the dopaminergic agonists and levodopa.
- (13) The book reads like a report to funding bodies, and, while it may be of use to project managers, it is insufficiently distilled for the editors' target audience of “busy clinicians and managers”.

Not so in Letters to the Editor where the author of the letter generally criticizes clearly identified scholars (see examples 9 to 11 above). Letters to the Editors frequently, though, and especially in Letters to the Editor published in US journals (Carnet/Magnet 2002; Magnet/Carnet 2006), criticisms are more “politically correct”, i.e., they are either expressed in a weak contentious mode by means of modulated expressions, such as “*In my opinion*”, “*We believe*”, or they focus more on an inanimate entity, such as the methods or the conclusions of a criticized research than on the research team itself (example 14 below).

- (14) We believe that the strategy used by Jick *et al.* of requiring a computer record of hospital admission led to a 20% underestimate of cases.

The fact that we examined Letters to the Editor published both in US and British medical journals could very well explain the relatively high frequency of covert criticisms recorded in our Letter to the Editor corpus.

### 5.2. *Moderately critical group: evaluative-factual and argumentative genres (Editorials and Review Articles)*

Our study has shown, on the one hand, that Editorials and Review Articles are less critical than Book Reviews and Letters to the Editor, and, on the other, that in Editorials and Review Articles critical comments tend to be overtly and personally expressed. To start with, it is important to mention that, like book reviewers, editorialists and review authors are generally commissioned by journal editors. This means that they are distinguished authorities with a well-established standing in their field who monitor the medical community line of thought and behavior. As a consequence, they are not “ordinary scientists” but “*expert knowledge holders*” (Hemais 2001: 57), advice-givers and orientators whose intention is to help clinicians and practitioners in the complex decision-making process of everyday medical praxis.

What is more, by being debate-focused and essay-like metatexts, Editorials offer a digest of current research because their situational context is much more than the mere repeating of arguments already expressed in previously published articles<sup>7</sup>. It rather consists in critically assessing the conclusions reached by previous research so as to provide ethical and professional guidelines to the medical community.

The relatively low frequency of criticism in Editorials can be explained by the fact that editorialists – unlike book reviewers and writers of Letters to the Editor – do not always find something nega-

---

7 In their research on medical Editorials, Magnet/Carnet (2006) distinguish between two types of Editorials: 1) those found in journals that address specialists in which editors comment on or highlight research papers published in the same issue, thus putting the research findings into perspective, and 2) those Editorials that do not comment on any particular paper but rather synthesize the results of several articles on one subject or report the trends in research approach on a specific issue at a given point in time.

tive to say about the article(s) they refer to. They quite frequently indeed wholeheartedly endorse specific research outcomes (Magnet/Carnet's Type 2 editorials). But when they do take a critical stance on an issue, editorialists also want to convince their readership of their point of view (Grabe/Kaplan 1997; Vihla 1999) and they do so in an overt and highly personal fashion so as to assert their authority in the field, as examples 15 and 16 illustrate.

- (15) Although Hayward and colleagues' meta-regression analysis showed no significant differences across all subgroups, the power of meta-regression [...] is limited, and the estimates in key subgroups provide pause for thought [...]. The other key concern is the complications of steroids, which cannot be investigated in a meta-analysis of this size.
- (16) In Protheroe *et al.*'s study, even this most basic safeguard against recall was ignored.

Review Articles were found to be the fourth most critical genre. Rowley-Jolivet (1999: 187) claims that Review Articles bear many similarities to plenary lectures in the sense that they present and collect information for a broad audience of specialists from different disciplines, i.e., they gather and clarify facts presented in previous research so as to summarize them and critically assess them for a busy audience. Review Articles then respond to an underlying concern that is sometimes overlooked: the limited time available to medical researchers and/or graduate students in the midst of an ever-growing and unlimited flow of published material.

Review Article writers – who, as well as editorialists and book reviewers, are frequently commissioned by journal editors – then critically evaluate other researchers' work, because their main role as medical researchers is to compare the findings of individual studies, i.e., to select and assess with a critical mind the most rigorous and scientifically sound previously published research and explain in detail the flaws of the studies they have not selected. Indeed, the conclusions reached in Review Articles should be as valid and robust as possible so as to enable their authors to dictate practical guidelines with a minimum degree of error. This is why the most frequent target of criticism in Review Articles is the methods used by previous re-

search, such as sampling technique, corpus size, wrong use of statistics, as example 17 illustrates.

- (17) We identified 80 randomized clinical trials of antibiotic treatment of acute sinusitis. Most of these studies were ineligible for our meta-analysis: 48 did not use the reference drugs pertinent to this analysis, 3 inextricably combined patients with sinusitis with those of other infections and 2 inextricably combined patients with acute, chronic and recurrent sinusitis.

The social role of the Review Article author, then, is certainly that of an expert evaluator, knowledge-holder and critic, but also that of a researcher who reports his/her own conclusions based on the meticulous and scrupulous examination of a certain number of carefully selected studies published on a given subject of interest to the scientific community.

### 5.3. *Least critical group: Finding-centered, experimental, objective, descriptive and narrative genres (Research Papers and Case Reports)*

Research Papers, the most widespread form of scientific discourse, aim at exporting the results of the scientific activities conducted in the laboratory to the specialist community of practice and then to society. Apparently, their main *raison d'être* is the scientific fact meant to contribute to the advancement of science. Indeed, one of the most salient communicative difference between Review Articles and Research Papers lies in the fact that Research Paper writers report the results of their *own* empirical research, the worth, soundness and validity of which they must justify in the eyes of the scientific community (referees, journal editors and readers).

It is now well known that one way of justifying the publication of one's research is to mention a gap in the literature (Swales 1990 and his famous CARS model, move 3). Indeed, academic discussions on new findings include a critical examination of previous claims and beliefs in order to place the encoder's own views in a "historical context", i.e., in perspective. That analysis subsequently becomes the starting point for the presentation of "innovative" arguments for which

encoders seek intellectual agreement. Research Paper writers, then, play the role of both knowledge-builder and knowledge holder in that their papers present *knowledge in the process of construction* and not (as in the case in the four previous genres analyzed here) a survey and/or critical analysis of current established knowledge.

It is not surprising, then, that this conceptual gap (example 18 below) constitutes the most frequent target of (impersonal) criticism in Research Papers. These are mostly voiced in a straightforward manner, i.e., without mitigation, and are encountered in the introduction sections of Research Papers.

- (18) The lack of published practice patterns makes it difficult to define the standard of care to guide the individual practitioner who is faced with a controversial issue. We are not aware either of any study that determines whether there are differences in practice patterns between those in academic and those in private practice [...]. Our study was thus designed to delineate current practice patterns.

The second most frequent type of criticism recorded in Research Papers is that aimed at the results of previous research, i.e., indirectly voiced at fellow researchers by means of the “responsibility-shifting strategy” (example 7). These criticisms are found in the discussion sections of Research Papers and are used as a way to demonstrate the superiority of one’s own research or to underline the fact that contradictions with previous claims do not undermine the validity of the current claims. The tone of these critical comments is neutral, detached and never reaches the highly subjective and polemic levels we observed in Book Reviews, Letters to the Editor or Editorials.

On the contrary, the criticisms recorded in the discussion sections of Research Papers are generally voiced in a more covert fashion (Hyland 1998; Vihla 1999) which often conveys semantic understatements aimed at minimizing opposition, as in example 19 below. By expressing their dissension in a tactful way, present-day academics intend to avoid the boomerang effect of a negative appraisal of their peers’ work.

- (19) Marx *et al* (\*) found that Apgar scores were higher when a regional rather than a general anesthetic was used for a cesarean section when there was fetal distress [...]. Based on our results, however, this does not seem to be the case.

Case reports were found to be the most uncritical genre. This can be accounted for by the fact that Case Report writers adopt a rather low profile. In Case Reports indeed, researchers play the role of low-key practitioners, short-story tellers who simply present one or a few unusual cases they have encountered in their praxis. In other words, Case Reports are the least argumentative, the most narrative genre of all. It is therefore not surprising to find such a low incidence of criticisms in this genre. The few examples we found in our Case Report sample are very much alike those encountered in Research Papers and mostly point to an underreporting of cases, i.e., a gap in the literature. These critical comments were all found in the introduction section (example 20 below) and were generally impersonally and overtly voiced:

- (20) Only a few of these cases come to the attention of psychiatrists. [...] The ODS (Olfactory Delusional Syndrome) has never been reported in Middle Eastern communities. The following case histories are described in order to [...].

## 6. Conclusions

This study has examined the way writers encode interpersonally sensitive information in six genres characteristic of medical discourse. Our quantitative results allowed us to conclude, firstly, that overall, and in spite of certain cross-generic differences, critical comments in these six genres are generally overtly expressed and, secondly, that we can divide the six genres into three groups according to the frequency of occurrence of criticism: 1) a highly critical group made up of Book Reviews and Letters to the Editor; 2) a moderately critical group composed of Editorials and Review Articles, and 3) the least critical group made up of Research Papers and Case Reports. This classification is intimately related to the argumentation level of the different genres. Indeed, as Werlich

(1983) puts forth, conflict is an essential feature of argumentative texts because the encoder either implicitly or explicitly states a problem to the scientific community. Hence, the more argumentative the genre, the most critical it is.

The above mentioned genre classification was explained in terms of the communicative function of each genre, the first two groups being researcher-centered, highly subjective, argumentative and evaluative in nature – thus presupposing a certain degree of interpersonal conflict –, whereas the latter is research-centered, narrative, descriptive and “factual” with a pretension to objectivity.

The cross-generic differences observed with respect to the targets of criticism were also accounted for in terms of the different communicative function of each genre. Book reviewers mostly voice their criticisms to the book content and hold the book itself accountable for such flaws, whereas Letters to the Editor writers mainly criticize previously published research results/methods/conclusions and personally accuse the researchers themselves. Editorialists, for their part, mostly criticize global aspects of previous research (unfounded or hasty conclusions), whilst Review Article writers rather concentrate their critical appraisals on methodological issues. By contrast, criticisms in the experimental/descriptive/narrative genres (Research Papers and Case Reports) mainly consist either in the mention of a conceptual gap which helps encoders to justify the publication of their own research or in the critical discussion of previous research findings which serves the purpose of defending the writers’ own findings and of convincing readers of the soundness and validity of the newly presented claims.

The social role assumed by the encoder in the different genres was found to be another key factor that determines the frequency, overtone and ‘personalization level’ of criticality. Editorialists play the role of critical appraisers, expert knowledge holders, decision-orientators with a well-established status within the scientific community who can therefore indulge in personally criticizing their peers, sometimes even in a condescending and/or sarcastic fashion. It is in Editorials, then, and, to a lesser extent in Review Articles, where the social distance between encoder and audience is the greatest of all. On the contrary, Case Report encoders play the “lowest-key role” of mere

observers and reporters who hardly offer any critical remark at all because their level of knowledge claim is very low. The social distance between writer and reader is then the smallest in Case Reports.

Our research thus points out that the six typical medical genres form a textual hierarchy and that the texture of medical writing changes from one genre to another, reflecting differences in their communicative function and in the social role assumed by their respective encoders. If we were to draw a scale or a continuum of the criticality level and interpersonal variables (social distance, rank and power) underlying the different genres analyzed here, Book Reviews and Letters to the Editor would appear at one end of the scale and Case Reports at the other. In between these two extremes, we would find Editorials and Review Articles whose writers play the role of both critical experts and knowledge holders/builders, and Research Paper writers who mainly assume the role of knowledge builders who must find their niche and promote the products of their intellectual activities.

## Acknowledgments

This research was supported by Grant M-976-09-06-A from the University of The Andes Research Center (CDCHT). We would particularly like to thank Dr. Abdel Fuenmayor for his valuable advice as specialist informant.

## References

- Alcaraz Ariza, María Ángeles 2009. Complimenting Others: The Case of English-Written Medical Book Reviews. *Fachsprache* 31/1-2, 50-65.

- Alcaraz Ariza, María Ángeles / Salager-Meyer, Françoise 2002. Género y Crítica en la Prosa Médica Escrita en Español: Función Comunicativa y Relación de Poder. *Hermes* 29, 163-186.
- Alcaraz Ariza, María Ángeles / Salager-Meyer, Françoise 2003. La Ciencia en Pugna: Análisis Retórico de la Crítica en el Discurso Médico Escrito en Español (1930-1999). *The ESPecialist* 24/1, 103-129.
- Aristotle (1908-1952). *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English under the Editorship of WD Ross, 12 vols.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bazerman, Charles / Paradis, James (eds) 1991. *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities.* Madison (WI): University of Wisconsin Press.
- Belcher, Diane 1995. Writing Critically across the Curriculum. In Belcher/Braine (eds), 135-155.
- Belcher, Diane / Braine, Georges (eds) 1995. *Academic Writing in a Second Language: Essays on Research and Pedagogy.* Norwood (NJ): Ablex
- Bhatia, Vijay K. 2002. LSP and Professional Practice: Negotiating Disciplinary Conflicts. In Gotti *et al.* (eds), 41-59.
- Biber, Douglas / Finegan, Edward 1989. Style and Stance in English: Lexical and Grammatical Marking of Evidentiality and Affect. *Text* 9/1, 93-124.
- Bloch, Joel 2003. Creating Materials for Teaching Evaluation in Academic Writing: Using Letters to the Editor in L2 Composition Courses. *English for Specific Purpose* 22, 347-364.
- Bloch, Joel / Chi, Lan 1995. A Comparison of the Use of Citations in Chinese and English Academic Discourse. In Belcher/Braine (eds), 231-277.
- Candlin, Christopher N. 2001. *New Discourses of the Clinic: Redefining the Patient in Healthcare. The Cardiff Lecture 2000.* Cardiff: University of Cardiff. Center for Health Communication Research and University of Wales.
- Candlin, Christopher N. / Lucas, Jennifer 1986. Interpretations and Explanations in Discourse: Modes of 'Advising' in Family Planning.

- In Ensink, Titus / Van Essen, Arthur / van der Geest, Ton (eds) *Discourse Analysis and Public Life*. Dordrecht: Foris, 13-38.
- Carnet, Didier / Magnet, Anne 2002. Letters to the Editor: Stratégies d'utilisation par une communauté de chercheurs francophones et tentative de caractérisation du genre. *Asp* 35/36, 89-103.
- Clarke, Mike / Alderson, Phil / Chalmers, Iain 2002. Discussion Sections in Reports of Controlled Trials Published in General Medical Journals. *JAMA* 287/21, 2799-2800.
- Do, Quy Toan 1989. Notes on Education in the Traditional Culture of Vietnam. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1/2, 13-17.
- Ehlich, Konrad / Wagner, Johannes (eds) (1995). *Discourse of Business Negotiation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Farrell, Lesley 1997. Doing Well, Doing Badly: An Analysis of the Role of Conflicting Cultural Values in Judgments of Relative Academic Achievement. In Duszak, Anna (ed.) *Culture and Style in Academic Discourse*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 63-89.
- Firth, Alan (ed.) 1995. *The Discourse of Negotiation. Studies of Language in the Workplace*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Giannoni, Davide S. 2002. Hard Words, Soft Technology. Criticism and Endorsement in the Software Review Genre. In Gotti *et al.* (eds), 335-362.
- Giannoni, Davide S. 2008. Popularizing Features in English Journal Editorials. *English for Specific Purposes* 27/2, 212-232.
- Gotti, Maurizio / Heller, Dorothee / Dossena, Marina (eds) 2002. *Conflict and Negotiation in Specialized Texts. Selected Papers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> CERLIS Conference*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Grabe, William / Kaplan, Robert B. 1997. On the Writing of Science and the Science of Writing: Hedging in Science Texts and Elsewhere. In Markkanen, Raija / Schröder, Hartmut (eds) *Hedging and Discourse. Approaches to the Analysis of a Pragmatic Phenomenon in Academic Texts*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 151-167.
- Harwood, Nigel 2008. An Interview-Based Study of the Functions of Citations in Academic Writing across Two Disciplines. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41, 497-518.
- Hemais, Barbara 2001. The Discourse of Research and Practice in Marketing Journals. *English for Specific Purposes* 20/1, 57-58.

- Horton, Richard 1995. The Rhetoric of Science. *The British Medical Journal* 310, 985-987.
- Hunston, Susan 1993. Professional Conflict: Disagreement in Academic Discourse. In Baker, Mona / Francis, Gill / Tognini-Bonelli, Elena (eds) *Text and Technology: in Honor of John Sinclair*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 115-133.
- Hyland, Ken 1998. *Hedging in Scientific Research Articles*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hyland, Ken 2000. *Disciplinary Discourses. Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. London: Longman.
- Kourilova, Magda 1994. Some Problems Posed by the System of Epistemic Modality in Written Scientific Discourse. In Brekke, Magnar / Andersen, Øivin / Dahl, Trine / Myking, Johan. (eds) *Applications and Implications of Current LSP Research*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 639-646.
- Kourilova, Magda 1996. Interactive Function of Language in Peer Reviews of Medical Papers Written by NN Users of English. *UNESCO-ALSED LSP Newsletter* 19/1, 4-21.
- Magnet, Anne / Carnet, Didier 2006. Letters to the Editor: Still Vigorous After All These Years? A Presentation of the Discursive and Linguistic Features of the Genre. *English for Specific Purposes* 25/2, 173-200.
- Moreno, Ana I. / Suárez, Lorena 2008. A Study of Critical Attitude across English and Spanish Academic Book Reviews. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7/1, 15-26.
- Motta-Roth. Désirée 1998. Discourse Analysis and Academic Book Reviews: A Study of Text and Disciplinary Cultures. In Fortanet, Inmaculada / Posteguillo, Santiago / Palmer, Juan Carlos / Coll, Juan Francisco (eds) *Genre Studies in English for Academic Purposes*. Castellón: Universitat Jaume I, 29-59.
- Myers, Greg 1989. The Pragmatic of Politeness in Scientific Articles. *Applied Linguistics* 10, 1-35.
- Nguyen, Huong H. 1988. Understanding Vietnamese Students: A Focus on Their Passive Attitude. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1/1, 19-25.
- Paltridge, Brian 1997. *Genre, Frames and Writing in Research Settings*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Rowley-Jolivet, Elizabeth 1999. The Pivotal Role of Conference Papers in the Network of Scientific Communications. *ASp* 23/26, 179-197.
- Salager-Meyer, Françoise 2001. From Self-Highlightedness to Self-Effacement: A Genre-Based Study of the Socio-Pragmatic Function of Criticism in Medical Discourse. *LSP and Professional Communication* 1/2, 63-85.
- Salager-Meyer, Françoise 2010. Academic Book Reviews and the Construction of Scientific Knowledge (1890-2005). In Gea Valor, María Lluís / García Izquierdo, Isabel / Esteve, María José (eds) *Linguistic and Translation Studies in Scientific Communication*. Bern: Peter Lang, 39-68.
- Salager-Meyer, Françoise / Alcaraz Ariza, María Ángeles 2004. Negative Appraisals in Academic Book Reviews: A Cross-Linguistic Approach. In Candlin, Christopher N. / Gotti, Maurizio (eds) *Intercultural Aspects of Specialized Communication*. Bern: Peter Lang, 149-172.
- Salager-Meyer, Françoise / Zambrano, Nahirana 2001. The Bittersweet Rhetoric of Controversiality in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>- Century French and English Medical Literature. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2/1, 141-173.
- Salager-Meyer, Françoise / Alcaraz Ariza, María Ángeles / Zambrano, Nahirana 2003. The Scimitar, the Dagger and the Glove: Intercultural Differences in the Rhetoric of Criticism in Spanish, French and English Medical Discourse (1930-1995). *English for Specific Purposes* 22/3, 223-247.
- Schramm, Andreas. 1996. Using Aspects to Express Viewpoints in EST Texts. *English for Specific Purposes* 15/2, 141-164.
- Smith, Richard 1999. The Case for Structuring the Discussion of Scientific Papers. *The British Medical Journal* 318, 1224-1225.
- Swales, John 1990. *Genre Analysis: English in Academic Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, John / Feak, Christine 1995. From Information Transfer to Data Commentary. *TESOL France Journal* 2/2, 79-93.
- Taylor, Gordon / Chen, Tingguang. 1991. Linguistic, Cultural and Sub-Cultural Issues in Contrastive Discourse Analysis: Anglo-

- American and Chinese Scientific Texts. *Applied Linguistics* 12, 319-336.
- Vihla, Minna 1999. *Medical Writing. Modality in Focus*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Webber, Pauline 1994. The Function of Questions in Different Medical Journal Genres. *English for Specific Purposes* 13/3, 257-269.
- Werlich, Egon. 1983. *A Text Grammar of English*. Heidelberg: Quelle and Meyer.