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**The rhetorical structure of academic book reviews of literature: An
English-Spanish cross-linguistic approach**

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing interest in the study of genres (Swales 1990). Recent research on the academic journal book review (BR) has shown that the BR in English is shaped according to a rhetorical structure that gives it genre status (Motta-Roth 1998). However, it is not known whether this rhetorical structure is shared by comparable texts in other languages. This chapter carried out an English-Spanish cross-linguistic study of the rhetorical structure of BRs on the basis of two comparable corpora of 20 BRs of literature in each language. The main results show that, despite sharing similar overall patterns of organization, the Spanish BRs of literature develop more descriptive moves and are less likely to end with criticism-loaded strategies.

Introduction

Never before have scholars had such easy and wide access to scientific knowledge as they do today. It is virtually impossible for academics to process all available information on any given scientific

topic, not to mention to distinguish truly valuable work from what is not. In this respect, the subgenre of the academic journal book review plays a very important role since it introduces new books to a particular discipline and, at the same time, assesses how valuable their contribution may be to the development of the field. According to Gea Valor and del Saz Rubio (2000-2001, p. 166), “in this genre, the writer informs the reader about the contents and structure of a recently-published book – usually the work of a fellow researcher – and most importantly evaluates the book according to various criteria, such as adequate treatment of the subject, usefulness for the prospective reader and possible future applications.” As a result, book reviews (BRs) have become an important source of information for scholars in a particular disciplinary field about which books may or may not be worth reading or acquiring.

However, as acknowledged by a number of professors from The University of León (Spain) and The University of London (UK) in informal interviews, writing a book review is not always a welcome task for academics. Yet academic journal book reviews are still written and published, and writing a book review is usually considered one of those tasks academics may have to do in their career. The interesting point is that the academic journal book review is one of those genres whose communicative function is widely recognized by the expert members of the discourse community involved in producing and interpreting academic

book reviews. In spite of this recognition, little is known about the features which contribute to making this class of communicative events a genre in its own right (see Swales 1990, p. 58 for a definition of genre). As the leading work by Swales (1990) clearly shows, one of the factors that play a very important role in the overall characterization of a genre is the rhetorical structure of the text. In fact, some research has recently explored how the schematic structure of the academic book review helps to shape this genre in order to make it recognizable by expert members of the discourse community.

Starting with Motta-Roth's (1998) pioneering empirical study of the rhetorical structure of 180 book reviews in English from the fields of Chemistry, Economics and Linguistics, this genre has been shown to be organized according to a series of moves and subfunctions that can be easily recognized. For instance, a typical move, or fragment of text with a recognizable general rhetorical function, is *Outlining the book*. A typical subfunction, or smaller fragment within that move, that performs a more specific rhetorical function in relation to its general purpose, is *Stating the topic of each chapter*. A typical subfunction within the closing move, *Providing closing evaluation of the book*, is *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings*. Subfunctions in this move are called options since they are mutually exclusive (i.e., unlike the subfunctions within the other sections or moves of the book review, they cannot co-

occur). Their function is to close the book being reviewed, usually through a verdict on such a book (see Method of Analysis below).

The results from Motta-Roth's (1998) study in relation to the overall rhetorical organization of book reviews seem to have been confirmed by other scholars such as De Carvalho (2001), who analyzed a corpus of English and Portuguese academic book reviews from the Literary Theory field in terms of their rhetorical structure, and Nicolaisen (2002), who submitted a corpus of Library and Information Science book reviews in English to move analysis. A comparison of their results reveals no crucial differences in the overall rhetorical organization of book reviews across these disciplines, in the sense that the major rhetorical functions performed by the different moves also take place. In this respect, it would be possible to hypothesize the existence of a common pattern of overall rhetorical structure across disciplines.

In spite of these common features, there seem to be slight differences within the overall rhetorical structure of book reviews across disciplines that might lead to hypothesize a certain degree of disciplinary variation. For example, in her study of the rhetorical structure of English and Portuguese academic book reviews of literature, De Carvalho (2001) detected a tendency for book reviewers from the two cultures to fuse moves *Outlining the book* and *Highlighting parts of the book* in a single move. In fact, her results led her to reduce Motta-Roth's (1998) four

moves to three by fusing moves *Outlining the book* and *Highlighting parts of the book* into only one move. The existence of disciplinary variations in the rhetorical structure of book reviews can also be conjectured from Nicolaisen's (2002) findings within the last move *Providing closing evaluation of the book* of Library and Information Science book reviews. Within this move, she detects the existence of two options (*Disqualifying [sic] the book despite indicated positive aspects* and *Neither recommending nor disqualifying the book* – the latter consisting in a neutral summary-conclusion of the book) which were not present in Motta-Roth's (1998) corpus of academic book reviews within other academic disciplines. A logical implication from these studies is that until more light is shed on the possible influence of the disciplinary factor on the rhetorical configuration of book reviews, further studies of the academic book review as a genre should at least control for this confounding factor in the design of their corpora (cf. Connor and Moreno, 2005).

On the other hand, the present paper also hypothesizes possible variation in the rhetorical structure of academic book reviews as a factor of the language culture. This conjecture is substantiated by De Carvalho's (2001) study of book reviews from two writing cultures: American and Portuguese. While all the texts in her corpora seem to share a common communicative purpose, interestingly different rhetorical features are

identified which may be due to differing cultural expectations. As Moreno (2004) explains, the idea that the rhetorical structures of texts in different languages might vary greatly and that such variation should be taken into account in language teaching programs has received considerable attention since it was first proposed by Kaplan (1966). Following this tradition, the present study deals with one possible question raised by the Kaplan hypothesis, i.e. whether differences actually exist in how academic book reviews of literature are internally organized to achieve their communicative purpose in two writing cultures: Spanish and English. Answering this question will contribute valuable knowledge to the field of Contrastive Rhetoric.

Research Questions and Variables

The major research question that the present study attempts to answer can be broken down as follows:

- Do English and Spanish book reviews from academic journals on Literature conform to a similar rhetorical structure? Answering this question will allow us to make some statement about the existence of a common genre for both writing cultures in terms of its

rhetorical organization.

- If there are differences in terms of rhetorical structure, what is their nature? This will allow us to make some statement about differing expectations of the rhetorical structure of this genre as a function of the writing culture.

In other words, the study sought to research the possible influence of the writing culture, i.e., the independent variable, on the rhetorical structure of literary academic book reviews, i.e., the dependent variable.

Data

To answer our research question, the study analysed the rhetorical structure of 20 academic book reviews in English and 20 comparable academic journal book reviews in Spanish. This collection of BRs has been named the *LIBRES* (*Literary Book Reviews in English-Spanish*) corpus. The reason why it is so small is that it has been compiled with a view to being approached from various complementary perspectives (e.g. Moreno and Suárez, 2006).

The criteria of comparability for selection of the present corpus were based mainly on Connor and Moreno's (2005) proposal. As Connor

and Moreno (2005) argue in connection with cross-cultural studies, “in large-scale textual analyses of written genres . . . it is important that we are comparing elements that can in fact be compared . . . A common platform of comparison is important at all levels of research” (Connor & Moreno, 2005, p. 157). One of these levels or phases of the research involves the selection of primary data. That is, in order to make a comparison valid, we need to compare text types or genres in which to observe linguistic and rhetorical features which are comparable between the two writing cultures.

As Moreno (2007) argues in this volume, to achieve a maximum of comparability, or similarity, between two corpora it is necessary to control as many relevant confounding factors as possible. This will make it possible to attribute any possible similarities or differences in the rhetorical structure of the texts to the effect of the independent variable, i.e. the writing culture. The academic discipline, directly related to the *field* factor (cf. Moreno, 2007), is a likely confounding factor. Therefore, the present study has decided to control for it statistically by collecting only texts from one major academic discipline (Literature) and four subfields (Drama, Poetry, Novel, and Literary Theory) in order to make the two corpora as similar as possible in this respect. Another reason for choosing such a discipline was that the only other existing contrastive study on academic journal book reviews between English and another language, Portuguese, was also based on Literary Theory (De Carvalho,

2001). Compiling a similar corpus would make it easier to compare results.

Likewise, since it is possible to distinguish between various subgenres within the book review genre, the present study narrowed its focus down to only the academic journal book review subgenre (i.e. book reviews that appear in academic journals). This restriction helped to control for certain contextual factors, such as the purpose of communication, the type of participants, the setting, the medium of publication, and so on, which might affect the rhetorical and linguistic configuration of the texts (cf. Moreno, 2008). The texts in the corpora of the present study were drawn following conventional sampling procedures from four academic journals, which are the following and cover the aforementioned subfields:

English journals

The Review of English Studies (texts from 2002)

English Literature in Transition: 1880-1920 (texts from 2002)

Notes and Queries (texts from 2000)

Studies in Romanticism (texts from 2001)

Spanish journals

España Contemporánea (texts from 2001)

Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea (texts from 2002)

Revista de Literatura (texts from 2000)

Revista de Poética Medieval (texts from 2001)

The number of book reviews drawn from each of the four journals in each corpus was five. Only book reviews published from 2000 onwards were selected for the sake of relevancy. Thus the present study will attempt to capture the essence of the genre in as specific a period as possible, and in particular, as it is conceived today, since the temporal factor might also affect the rhetorical configuration of texts (cf. Moreno, 2008).

Another important confounding factor taken into account was text length because the extension of an academic review may determine whether it belongs to the book review genre or to related genres such as the book note, which is notably longer. Thus the length of all the reviews in the corpus ranged from 569 to 2,063 words. Table 1 below shows the average number of words per book review and the average number of words in each corpus. The overall correspondence of length between the English and the Spanish corpora also contributes to their comparability.

Table 7.1. Number of words in book reviews in the corpus

	Number of Words	
	English	Spanish
Total number of words, all BRs	21,382	22,084
Average number of words per BR in each corpus	1,069.1	1,104.2

Lastly, by contrast to Moreno (1998), who controlled for the superstructure factor statistically in the design of her corpora, the present design left that factor uncontrolled precisely because this was the dependent variable under research.

Method of Analysis

The methodology employed in the present study was directed to answering the aforementioned research questions. In order to describe the rhetorical patterns of textual organization preferred by English and Spanish academic book review writers, all the book reviews in the two corpora were analyzed in terms of moves, subfunctions and options. Motta-Roth's (1998) rhetorical model of book review moves was followed initially. The moves were identified by inferring the rhetorical function developed by the various sections in the entire text in connection with the overall purpose of the text. The subfunctions and options—the former being non-exclusive and the latter, referred to as subfunctions by Motta-Roth (1998), being exclusive—were identified as minor functional units

realizing the different moves.

After applying this model to our corpora, the rhetorical scheme that emerged was very similar, except for a few differences. The scheme is shown in Figure 7.1 and can be considered as an adapted version of Motta-Roth's (1998) model. It represents the rhetorical structure of the book reviews from academic journals on Literature. The italicized moves, subfunctions and options highlight the differences that have arisen by contrast with Motta-Roth's (1998) scheme. The meaning of the new subfunctions and options will be explained later.

- **Move 1. Introducing the book**
 - Subfunction 1.1 Defining the general topic of the book and/or
 - Subfunction 1.1.1. Developing an aspect of the general topic and/or
 - Subfunction 1.2. Informing about potential readership and/or
 - Subfunction 1.3. Informing about the author and/or
 - Subfunction 1.4. Making topic generalizations and/or
 - Subfunction 1.5. Inserting the book in the field and/or
 - Subfunction 1.6. *Informing about the writing technique used by the writer and/or*
 - *Fuzzy category 1.1. Defining the general topic of the book/1.4. Making topic generalizations and/or*
 - *Fuzzy category 1.1. Defining the general topic of the book/1.6. Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer and/or*
 - *Fuzzy category 1.1.1. Developing an aspect of the general topic/1.6. Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the author*
- **Move 2. Outlining the book**
 - Subfunction 2.1. Providing an overview of the organization of the book and/or
 - Subfunction 2.2. Stating the topic of each chapter and/or
 - Subfunction 2.3. Citing extra-text material
- ***Fusion of moves 1. Introducing the book & 2. Outlining the book***
 - *Fusion of subfunctions 1.1. Defining the general topic of the book/2.1. Providing general view of the organization of the book/2.3. Citing extra-text material*
- **Move 3. Highlighting parts of the book**
 - Subfunction 3.1. Providing focused evaluation
- ***Fusion of moves 2. Outlining the book & 3. Highlighting parts of the book***
 - *Fusion of subfunctions 2.1. Providing an overview of the organization of the book/3.1. Providing focused evaluation and/or*
 - *Fusion of subfunctions 2.2. Stating the topic of each chapter/3.1. Providing focused evaluation*
- **Move 4. Providing closing evaluation of the book**
 - *Option 4.1. Definitely recommending the book or*
 - *Option 4.2. Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings or*
 - *Option 4.3. Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths or*
 - *Option 4.4. Providing neutral summary-conclusion of the book*

Figure 7.1. Move analysis applied to the English and Spanish corpora of BRs

By way of illustration of how this model accounts for the rhetorical structure of one particular book review, the Appendix shows a coded version of a prototypical book review from the English corpus. The information in the subheadings of the Appendix indicates the moves and, separated by a semicolon, the corresponding subfunction(s) or options realizing them.

The major differences compared to Motta-Roth's (1998) model are the following: Move 1. *Introducing the book* contains five variations. One relates to subfunction 1.1.1. *Developing an aspect of the general topic*. This subfunction, which was not present in Motta-Roth's (1998) study, contains more detailed information of the general content of the book, which is dealt with in the subfunction called 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book*. An example of subfunction 1.1.1. *Developing an aspect of the general topic of the book* is given below. A fragment of subfunction 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book* within the same move is also given to show the change from the general topic of the book being reviewed to a more specific aspect of its content. In example (1), the square brackets at the beginning and the end of each fragment signal the beginning and end respectively of the subfunctions. The code at the end of the example indicates the book review from which the text fragment has been extracted.

- (1) [. . . the debates and tensions which Tamar Katz explores in *Impressionist Subjects* . . . arguing that the impressionist techniques of modernist fiction represent more than an experiment in form . . . (*Defining the general topic of the book*)]
- [. . . She seeks to show how debates about women's nature and social-spiritual impact informed the modernist commitment to interiority with its ambiguous connection to particular sensations and abstract, mysterious truths . . . (*Developing an aspect of the general topic*)] [elt440-17E]

The fragment of text coded as *Defining the general topic of the book* in example (1) deals with the topic of the book under review in general terms. The reader gets the basic idea that the book is about debates and tensions related to *Impressionist Subjects*. The fragment of text coded as *Developing an aspect of the general topic* develops this topic by providing specific information about those debates and tensions. That is why the second paragraph has been assigned to subfunction *Developing an aspect of the general topic*.

The second difference from Motta-Roth's (1998) scheme within move 1. *Introducing the book* relates to subfunction 1.6. *Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer*, which tells readers

about the writing technique or method employed by the author and was not acknowledged by Motta-Roth's (1998) scheme. Consider example (2):

(2) [La autora elige para su tarea un método histórico-inductivo. Es decir, selecciona los poemas que comparten el criterio de verbalizar explícitamente una fórmula de despedida, y los estudia sistemáticamente para extraer los rasgos que puedan definir el género en cuestión. (*Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer*)] [rlit243-7S]

(Trans.) [The author chooses a historical-inductive method for her task. That is to say, she selects those poems that share the criterion of explicitly verbalizing a farewell formula, and she studies them systematically in order to draw the features characterizing the genre in question. (*Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer*)] [rlit243-7S]

In this text fragment taken from a Spanish book review, the book reviewer describes the methodological tool used by the author of the book. The reviewer regards it as an historical-inductive method, whereby such an author focuses only on poems containing a farewell formula and

analyzes them in the search for common patterns that make it possible to talk about a distinct genre.

The last three differences from Motta-Roth's (1998) study in relation to move 1. *Introducing the book* have to do with the fact that some of the fragments within move 1. *Introducing the book* were of a fuzzy function, in such a way that a given fragment of text could be said to develop two rhetorical functions at the same time. This phenomenon affected the following pairs of subfunctions, though only in the Spanish corpus: 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book* and 1.4. *Making topic generalizations*; 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book* and 1.6. *Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer*; 1.1.1. *Developing an aspect of the general topic* and 1.6. *Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer*. In cases like these it has been necessary to introduce a new category in the scheme since it was not possible to assign these fragments to two categories at the same time. Example (3) shows a fragment of a book review from the corpus developing the functions 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book* and 1.4. *Making topic generalizations* at the same time.

- (3) [El modernismo simbolista, sentido como provocación por parte de quienes sentían el desarraigo, la escisión del yo y la desmembración de la totalidad, contra la práctica

arrolladora del realismo-positivista durante la Restauración, es inseparable de las opciones modernizadoras del conjunto social español hacia 1900, pese a quienes, a lo largo del siglo XX, trataron de divorciar ideológicamente el llamado intelectualismo noventayochista del no menos supuesto reaccionarismo atribuido al estetismo decadente, algunos de cuyos miembros fueron juzgados *ad libitum*, con argumentos biográficos a veces extrapolados de debilidades políticas muy posteriores. (*Subfunctions defining the general topic of the book & making topic generalizations*)
[ec117-5S]

(Trans.) [The symbolist modernism, seen as provocation by those who felt the rootlessness, the split in the ego and the dismembering of totality, against the overwhelming practice of positivist realism during the Restoration, is inseparable from the modernizing options of the Spanish society around 1900, in spite of those who, throughout the 20th century, tried to separate ideologically the so-called intellectuallism of the 90's from the not less supposed reactionarism attributed to the decadent aesthetism, some of whose members were judged *ad libitum*, with biographical arguments sometimes extrapolated from much later

political weaknesses. (*Subfunctions defining the general topic of the book & making topic generalizations*) [ec117-5S]

The text fragment in example (3) has been assigned to subfunctions 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book* and 1.4. *Making topic generalizations* on the grounds that it was difficult to decide which of the two subfunctions was being realized. On the one hand, it might be interpreted that the book reviewer is adding some insight from his/her own knowledge, in which case the subfunction performed would be 1.4. *Making topic generalizations*. On the other hand, the reader may also understand such a fragment as part of the content of the book, in the sense that all the ideas contained in the fragment can be attributed to the author of the book. Given the difficulty in deciding between the two subfunctions, the present study found it necessary to consider cases like this as a fuzzy category comprising the two subfunctions.

There are also differences with respect to Motta-Roth's (1998) scheme in relation to the other book review moves. For example, subfunction 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book* from move 1. *Introducing the book* and subfunctions 2.1. *Providing an overview of the organization of the book* and 2.3. *Citing extra-text material* from move 2. *Outlining the book* are difficult to keep apart in one fragment of the English corpus, as shown in example (4).

- (4) [In ten richly detailed chapters supported by sixty-eight illustrations, Kate Flint examines the complexities of looking and seeing and recording and interpreting the visible world (*Fusion of moves outlining the book & introducing the book; fusion of subfunctions providing an overview of the organization of the book, citing extra-text material & defining the general topic of the book*)] [elt76-11E]

A similar case of fusion of subfunctions relates to moves 2. *Outlining the book* and 3. *Highlighting parts of the book*. Both in the English and the Spanish corpora, some of the book reviews selected for the study fused these two moves in a single one. This tendency seems to corroborate the results obtained by De Carvalho's (2001) study (see introduction), who analysed a corpus of book reviews from a related academic discipline, Literary Theory. The subfunctions that specifically appeared fused across these two moves in the two corpora were 2.2. *Stating the topic of each chapter* from move 2. *Outlining the book* and 3.1. *Providing focused evaluation* from move 3. *Highlighting parts of the book*. A clear example is shown in the book review in the Appendix, which presents a section where the topic of each chapter and focused evaluation are provided at the same time. Less frequently, and only in the

Spanish corpus, subfunctions 2.1. *Providing an overview of the organization of the book* from move 2. *Outlining the book* and 3.1. *Providing focused evaluation* from move 3. *Highlighting parts of the book* were also fused. In cases like these, a new category has been introduced since one function is inseparable from the other.

There are also a number of differences in relation to Motta-Roth's (1998) scheme in move 4. *Providing closing evaluation of the book*. One difference has to do with the fact that in the present corpora there were no realizations of Motta-Roth's (1998) *Definitely disqualifying* [sic] *the book* because there was no single case in all the book reviews where the authors simply did not recommend the book under review. That is why, in this study, Motta-Roth's (1998) *Option 10A* was reformulated as 4.1. *Definitely recommending the book* instead of *Definitely recommending/disqualifying the book*. An example of option 4.1. *Definitely recommending the book* from the English corpus in the present study is shown in example (5).

- (5) [As Labbe points out, even in recent studies which have focused on different aspects of the Romantic romance, critics have exhibited a discomfort with the terms offered by romance as a genre. Her own exploration of the culturally disruptive potential of violence is welcome for

allowing readers to confront a wide and varied range of texts. Whether she is reassessing well known poems or exploring the less familiar, her readings are lively and refreshing. By challenging earlier critical assessments and bringing neglected works to the fore, she is demanding a reappraisal of our definition of Romanticism itself. Impeccably researched and usefully annotated, her book will be valuable to scholars and students both of the individual poets discussed and of the Romantic period as a whole. (*Definitely recommending the book*) [res147-20E]

Throughout example (5), the final paragraph of the review, the reviewer implies a recommendation of the book by bringing up some definitive positive remarks, which are not fully justified because they are based on the discussion of the book that has preceded, and by referring to the benefit that the public can receive from reading it.

The second important difference in move 4. *Providing closing evaluation of the book* relates to the fact that in the present corpora this move could be realized through an option chosen from among four. This contrasts with Motta-Roth's study, where this move was constrained to only two options. The two new options that emerged in the present corpora are 4.3. *Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths*

and 4.4. *Providing neutral summary-conclusion of the book*, whose existence as part of the rhetorical structure of book reviews has recently been reported by Nicolaisen (2002) in her study of Library and Information Science book reviews.

4.3. *Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths* is the opposite option of 4.2. *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings*.¹ The importance of this option lies in the fact that it is the only one that implies non-recommendation of the book under review in the corpus of the present study. Let us consider example (6).

- (6) [Given Jasper's method of treating his subject, I would suggest that it is his engagement with the minute particulars – the appropriate analogy, the engaging comparison, the startling reading of a particular text or painting – that will reward a patient reader. His claims for reconsidering the positions of Coleridge and Arnold as biblical critics, his fascinating analysis of Turner's paintings as biblical criticism, and his claims for a renewed understanding of the relevance of romanticism to modern theological issues are certainly parts that we all should be grateful for. For my part, however, I would prefer a more systematically developed and more historically informed argument; and

thus I find that this volume in “Perspectives in Romanticism” – despite some strong individual parts – does not fully deliver what the series promises. (*Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths*)]
[srw611-3E]

The move 4. *Providing closing evaluation of the book* shown in example (6) opens with a series of positive remarks on the book being reviewed, to later on change the direction of the evaluation into a couple of criticisms leading to not recommending the book. It should be noted how this strategy, consisting of condemning the book after having raised some positive points, produces a mitigating effect of the global non-recommendation and of the specific upcoming criticisms in particular (Belcher, 1995; Gea Valor & del Saz Rubio, 2000-01)

This divergence in relation to Motta-Roth’s (1998) study of book reviews in Linguistics, Economics and Chemistry suggests that there might be disciplinary differences as to how appropriate it seems for authors not to recommend a book and, in case this is so, which options are more acceptable in each disciplinary culture. Further qualitative research should attempt to find out the possible reasons for this variation.

Lastly, according to the new emerging option 4.4. *Providing neutral summary-conclusion of the book*, the reviewers choose to close the

review without giving a final judgement of the book. Instead of providing the reader with a verdict, they simply present a brief summary or conclusion of the book. An example of this option is shown in example (7).

- (7) [At the end of the day, in Professor Howe's view, Twain as a novelist cannot win; history and reality inevitably defeat the novel. There is no room here for any notion as quaint as the transforming power of the novelistic imagination. *(Providing neutral summary-conclusion of the book)*]
[n&q383-15E]

This book review ending does not clearly attempt to recommend the book under review. It rather describes the conclusion that Professor Howe, the author, reaches.

This section has described the method of analysis applied to the corpus of book reviews of the present study. Such a method of analysis in terms of rhetorical moves, subfunctions and options has identified new items with respect to Motta-Roth's (1998) schematic model, namely subfunctions 1.1.1. *Developing an aspect of the general topic*; 1.6. *Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer*; Fuzzy category 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book*/1.4. *Making topic generalizations*; Fuzzy category 1.1. *Defining the general topic of*

the book/1.6. Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer; Fuzzy category 1.1.1. Developing an aspect of the general topic/1.6. Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer; Fusion of moves 1. Introducing the book and 2. Outlining the book; Fusion of subfunctions 1.1 Defining the general topic of the book, 2.1. Providing an overview of the organisation of the book, and 2.3. Citing extra-text material; Fusion of moves 2. Outlining the book and 3. Highlighting parts of the book; Fusion of subfunctions 2.1. Providing an overview of the organization of the book and 3.1. Providing focused evaluation; Fusion of subfunctions 2.2. Stating the topic of each chapter and 3.1. Providing focused evaluation; option 4.3. Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths; and option 4.4. Providing neutral summary-conclusion of the book. The following section deals with the contrastive results obtained in the study.

Contrastive Results

This section presents the contrastive results of the analysis of the book reviews in terms of moves, subfunctions and options, carried out independently in the two corpora. Table 7.2 provides an account of the absolute and relative frequencies of each of these categories for each

writing culture.

Table 7.2. Frequency of moves, subfunctions and options in the English and Spanish corpora

	English BRs (20)		Spanish BRs (20)		Comparison χ^2
	n	%	n	%	
Move 1. Introducing the book	19	95%	20	100%	1.026
Subfunction 1.1. Defining the general topic of the book	18	90%	15	75%	1.558
Subfunction 1.1.1. Developing an aspect of the general topic	1	5%	3	15%	1.111
Subfunction 1.2. Informing about potential readership	1	5%	2	10%	.36
Subfunction 1.3. Informing about the author	1	5%	7	35%	5.625**
Subfunction 1.4. Making topic generalizations	3	15%	3	15%	0
Subfunction 1.5. Inserting book in the field	5	25%	10	50%	2.667
Subfunction 1.6. Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer	0	0%	3	15%	3.243
Fuzzy category 1.1. Defining the general topic of the book/1.4. Making topic generalisations	0	0%	1	5%	1.026
Fuzzy category 1.1. Defining the general topic of the book/1.6. Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer	0	0%	1	5%	1.026
Fuzzy category 1.1.1. Developing an aspect of the general topic/1.6. Informing about the writing technique/methodology used by the writer	0	0%	2	10%	2.105
Move 2. Outlining the book	7	35%	20	100%	19.259***
Subfunction 2.1. Providing general view of the organization of the book	4	20%	8	40%	1.905
Subfunction 2.2. Stating the topic of each chapter	6	30%	12	60%	3.623
Subfunction 2.3. Citing extra-text material	2	10%	4	20%	.784
Fusion of moves 1. Introducing the book & 2. Outlining the book	1	5%	0	0%	1.026
Subfunction 1. Defining the general topic of the book, 2.1. Providing general view of the organization of the book & 2.3. Citing extra-text material	1	5%	0	0%	1.026
Move 3. Highlighting parts of the book	13	65%	8	40%	2.506
Subfunction 3.1. Providing focused evaluation	13	65%	8	40%	2.506
Fusion of moves 2. Outlining the book & 3. Highlighting parts of the book	3	15%	7	35%	2.133
Fusion of subfuncts. 2.1. Providing general view of the organization of the book & 3.1. Providing focused evaluation	0	0%	1	5%	1.026
Fusion of subfuncts. 2.2. Stating the topic of each chapter & 3.1. Providing focused evaluation	3	15%	6	30%	1.29
Move 4. Providing closing evaluation of the book	18	90%	17	85%	.229
Option 4.1. Definitely recommending the book	3	15%	11	55%	8.707***
Option 4.2. Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings	11	55%	4	20%	5.042*
Option 4.3. Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths	3	15%	1	5%	1.005
Option 4.4. Providing neutral summary-conclusion of the book	1	5%	1	5%	.002

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

Given the fact that subfunctions are not mutually exclusive (i.e. the subfunctions within a move can co-occur), the sum of the frequencies of subfunctions within moves 1. *Introducing the book* and 2. *Outlining the book* is higher than the total frequency of appearance of each move because these moves may contain one or more than one subfunction. That is why the relative frequency of appearance of subfunctions within each move has been calculated in relation to 20, which is the total number of book reviews, i.e. the total possible absolute frequency for each subfunction. By contrast, options within move 4. *Providing closing evaluation of the book*, are mutually exclusive; thus, their relative frequency has been calculated in relation to the total frequency of appearance of that move in each corpus. The frequencies of move 3. *Highlighting parts of the book* and its only possible subfunction, 3.1. *Providing focused evaluation* coincide necessarily.

The right column in Table 7.2 provides statistical information in connection with the comparison of the frequencies of the use of each category across the two writing cultures under study. The results of the present study were submitted to statistical analysis through the Chi-square test of homogeneity in a contingency table. The Chi-square test is a type of non-parametric test used to compare frequencies in studies dealing with data measurable with nominal scales (cf. Brown, 1988). The statistical

comparison of the frequencies of use of the various moves, subfunctions and options at a $p < .05$ level and a $p < .01$ level made it possible to decide whether the differences in the appearance of each category between English and Spanish were significant and highly significant respectively, statistically speaking.

Within move 1. *Introducing the book*, except for subfunctions 1.1. *Defining the general topic of the book* and 1.4. *Making topic generalizations*, all the other subfunctions present higher absolute frequencies in the Spanish corpus, which might suggest that this descriptive move is more elaborated on by Spanish book review writers. However, the comparison of those frequencies in English and Spanish through the Chi-square test shows that the difference of use of such subfunctions is only statistically significant in the case of subfunction 1.3. *Informing about the author*, $\chi^2(1, N=40) = 5.625, p = .048$.

Move 2. *Outlining the book*, the other mainly descriptive move in the book review genre, also shows higher frequencies of occurrence in the Spanish corpus. The difference of use of this move between the two corpora is highly significant statistically speaking, $\chi^2(1, N=40) = 19.259, p = .000$. Although the frequencies of use of the subfunctions within move 2. *Outlining the book* are higher in the Spanish corpus, the difference of use between the two writing cultures under study is not statistically significant.

Move 3. *Highlighting parts of the book*, and the only subfunction by which it is realized, *Providing focused evaluation*, can be said to be preferred by English book review writers. This contrasts with the higher frequencies of the fusion of moves 2. *Outlining the book* and 3. *Highlighting parts of the book* in the Spanish corpus of book reviews. English book review writers seem to be more likely to keep separate the description of the book's chapters and evaluative remarks on the book. However, there is no statistical evidence for these two diverging tendencies.

Especially relevant to the present study were options 4.1. *Definitely recommending the book* and 4.2. *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings* within move 4. *Providing closing evaluation of the book*. Both of these options reflect the English and the Spanish reviewers' lower tendency to criticize books in a straightforward way in the concluding part of the review, although this is done differently in the two writing cultures. While Spanish reviewers show a much higher tendency to recommend books with no room for criticism through option 4.1. *Definitely recommending the book*, English-language reviewers tend to moderate their positive verdicts mainly through option 4.2. *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings*. The difference in use of these two options is statistically significant for these two writing cultures: while the difference in use of option 4.1. *Definitely*

recommending the book between the two languages is highly significant, $\chi^2(1, N=35) = 8.407$, $p=.010$, the difference in use of option 4.2. *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings* is marginally significant, $\chi^2(1, N=35) = 5.042$, $p=.056$. More infrequently, English-language writers close their review with option 4.3. *Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths*.

Conclusion

The present study can be said to have successfully answered the research question posed at the beginning. The results have shown a number of common repeated patterns in terms of the rhetorical structure of the academic book review, such as the existence of a number of common moves, subfunctions and options between English and Spanish that help to confirm the consideration of the academic book review as a distinct genre across the two language cultures. In this sense, the study has contributed, with more evidence, to a better definition and refinement of the academic book review genre in terms of its rhetorical structure following the steps given by Motta-Roth (1998).

However, contrasting the rhetorical behavior of the two writing cultures under study has revealed differences in the frequency of

appearance of the various subfunctions and options within the moves. Two important observations could be corroborated statistically. First, there seems to be evidence of the fact that Spanish book reviewers are more likely to use the descriptive moves of the book review. Statistically speaking, this is reflected in move 1. *Introducing the book* in the use of subfunction 1.3. *Informing about the author*. It is also reflected in the use of move 2. *Outlining the book* in general. Second, the statistical analysis of the results showed that Spanish book review writers seem to be more sympathetic in their evaluations than English writers. This has been corroborated statistically in move 4. *Providing closing evaluation of the book* for option 4.1. *Definitely recommending the book*, and for option 4.2. *Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings*. These differences might be attributed to the rhetorical preferences of the English and Spanish cultures in relation to book review writing, which may respond to differing cultural expectations of this genre.

Thus the present cross-cultural findings have contributed to the identification of further areas of similarity and divergence between the two writing cultures compared. If we now wish to make these cross-cultural results applicable to fields such as the teaching of writing, further qualitative research should attempt to explain the sources of this variation by referring to cultural features of the two writing cultures. In other words, having found out that the writing culture (our independent variable) is

likely to be the factor that accounts for certain rhetorical variations, the next logical step in the research would be to pinpoint which specific aspect(s) (e.g., values, norms, and learning processes) of the writing cultures would be responsible for a given variation in rhetorical behavior (cf. Moreno, 2005). That is, not only awareness of the differences (and similarities) but also the reasons for such divergence would be helpful in applied fields such as the teaching of academic book writing in Spanish and English as L2.

The study has also provided valuable tools that can be easily taught in the writing classroom, for example, a model of move analysis for book reviews of literature. An adequate application of these tools might be useful not only for teaching book review writing techniques in the L2 writing classroom but also in the L1 writing classroom. Likewise, these kinds of results might also be useful for designing guidelines for prospective authors of academic book reviews in each discipline. In fact, some editors consulted in this respect have already shown an interest in the possible application of the results from a study of these characteristics.

Finally, the findings of the present study should be supported with similar analyses applied to larger corpora in order to find out, for example, whether English book review writers' tendency to keep the description of the book's chapters and focused evaluations on the book separate differs significantly, statistically speaking, from Spanish book reviewers'

tendency to describe the chapters of the book and evaluate them at the same time. It would also be interesting to look at academic book reviews from other disciplines, as stated in the introduction of the present study. Looking at different disciplines might add interesting divergences from the ones the present study has shown in relation to the writing culture factor. If differences were found, it would be very relevant to follow up this research with further studies, both qualitative and quantitative, to find out to what extent writing practices in the discipline of literature in general affect the way book review writers approach this genre.

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Notes

¹Though Motta-Roth (1998) did allow for the possibility of finding her subfunction 10B (*Recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings*) with the opposite meaning, she did not state that possibility explicitly as a distinct option. In the present study it was necessary to give the option *Not recommending the book despite indicated strengths* a separate status. In addition, we have decided to use the phrase *not recommending* instead of *disqualifying* because it is a more straightforward term.

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Appendix

Move analysis of a prototypical literary academic journal book review

Kate Flint. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000. xvi + 427 pp. \$74.95. [elt76-11E]

Move introducing the book; subfunction defining the general topic of the book

Far more than a handbook to the representational codes of Victorian narrative painting (though it provides help with that function as well), *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* is best understood as several sets of essays, with different approaches, on topics related to what might now be called the Victorians' "visual literacy" – and to our own.

Fusion of moves outlining the book & introducing the book; fusion of subfunctions providing an overview of the organization of the book, citing extra-text material & defining the general topic of the book

In ten richly detailed chapters supported by sixty-eight illustrations, Kate Flint examines the complexities of looking, seeing, recording and interpreting the visible world.

Move introducing the book; subfunction making topic generalizations

Victorian paintings and novels are typically crowded with material details which encode a set of cultural values as well as represent the viewpoint of their creator. In addition, engraving and photography and cheap periodicals spread images to an ever widening public, who learned how people and objects both nearby and abroad were "supposed" to look. Twentieth-century theorists have often identified "accumulation and precise recording of detail" as not only a hallmark of the spirit of realism in art and fiction but also a significant feature of metaphysics, social science, and other Victorian modes of "reading" the world. At the same time, Victorians also recognized that appearances could be deceptive and made use of that recognition in both art and fiction.

Move introducing the book; subfunction defining the general topic of the book

The book takes several different points of entry into the questions of vision in the Victorian imagination. Among its topics are the limits of visibility, the relationship between the seen and the unseen, nineteenth-century efforts to expose previously concealed physical and social phenomena, and the shift in art critics' language from an emphasis on constructing (or teaching spectators to construct) a coherent narrative to a more broadly aesthetic analysis both of painterly technique and of questions about the psychology of perception. Thus *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* is interdisciplinary in the broadest sense: it draws on art, literature, critical theory, social theory, science and philosophy, and considers the most ephemeral nineteenth-century productions as well as those that still challenge our powers of interpretation.

Fusion of moves outlining the book & highlighting parts of the book; fusion of subfunctions stating the topic of each chapter & providing focused evaluation

Amid this richness, some chapters seemed to me more successful than others, though I presume other readers will make different choices. The chapter on dust ("A paradoxical substance associated with disease"), a marker of class status but also an equalizer, revealing some secrets only under a microscope yet responsible for the sky's magnificence at sunset is itself a Victorian tour-de-force of hyper-abundant detail drawn from almost sixty nineteenth-century authorities ranging from Florence Nightingale and Isabella Beeton, through scientists such as John Tyndall, to literature by Dickens, Gaskell, Tennyson and so forth. Some of the works could have been discovered (I should think) only with the help of our most recent mode of accessing the otherwise invisible: how would Flint have found *Steam Power from House Dust for Electric Lighting and*

Other Purposes (London: Refuse Disposal Company, 1892) or *Dust Ho! and Other Pictures from Troubled Lives* without the ability to make keyword searches of library catalogues? But in the end this vast heap of citations, even spun together in dizzying verbal webs of speculation, does not seem to produce anything I can remember or use.

I was much more enlightened by the following chapter, “Blindness and insight”, which focused its wealth of analysis and commentary on two works from 1856, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* and John Everett Millais’s *The Blind Girl*. Since I need the same training in how to read a painting that mid-Victorian art critics provided for less-sophisticated viewers, I learned a great deal from Flint’s exploration of the range of meanings to be extracted from *The Blind Girl*’s “affective significations” and typological symbolism as well as from the contexts in which blindness was discussed and the multiple connotations to be drawn from contemporary representations of the seen and the unseen.

The book is especially impressive in its uses of nineteenth-century science. For example, Flint makes a brilliant application of debates from experimental physiology to George Eliot’s puzzling short novel *The Lifted Veil*. Another chapter explores the way in which scientists themselves searched for an “expressive set of visual images” which could satisfactorily convey their explanations of the unseen forces that act on the physical world. Similarly, the nineteenth-century predecessors of Freud, she argues, were drawn to a “vocabulary of surface and depth, of the hidden and the revealed, of dark and of light” which was also applied to the topography of modern cities, especially to the threats posed by both the literal and the figurative “underworld.”

The two chapters on Victorian art criticism demonstrate the critics’ roles and practices as well as explore the period’s theoretical debates. Readers of *ELT* may be especially interested in the long chapter centered on the Ruskin-Whistler controversy. Whistler’s objection to the attempt by critics to discover a single significant meaning-or, indeed, any meaning-in a work of art brings up issues applicable in considering the

modes of indeterminacy found in late-nineteenth-century literary practices. And all of us need to read “Criticism, language and narrative” both to enrich our appreciation of the “predictable associations” stirred by particular forms and objects and to broaden our response to the questions students inevitably bring up on those class days when we are showing slides of Victorian paintings in order to give them time to get further into a long novel before we begin the discussion.

Chapter 10, “Hallucination and vision”, originates in a consideration of the *fin-de-siècle* “problem picture.” Although easy-to-read narrative paintings were still widely popular, critics had come to treat the public enthusiasm as a “mark of vulgar taste.” Problem pictures, however, presented a narrative that was not easily read; Flint calls them the “visual equivalents” of fiction such as Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* or *The Wings of a Dove*. Often presenting a sexually charged scene, the painting left its viewers asking questions about what was happening, what the outcome might be, and whether or not there was a didactic moral to be drawn.

Since these paintings – such as Frank Dicksee’s *A Reverie* (1894) and Millais’s *Speak! Speak!* (1895) – are much less familiar than the high-Victorian narrative pictures, I certainly wish I could see them better. The book’s major flaw is not the fault of Professor Flint but of Cambridge University Press. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* has been produced on heavy slick paper with generous margins (and an awkward shape), which not only makes it almost impossible for someone without large hands and muscular forearms to hold the book in a comfortable position for reading but also raises the price to \$74.95. Yet even so, many of the black-and-white illustrations, especially the photographs of those overcrowded genre paintings whose details are so important, are too muddy for us to see the distant objects or bits of background that contribute to Flint’s interpretive reading. I understand that color reproductions would put the price completely out of reach, but the compromise made here by the press is pretty unsatisfactory.

Move providing closing evaluation of the book; option recommending the book despite indicated shortcomings

The price is particularly unfortunate because this is a book many people would like to own so they can reread some of the more intensely rich chapters or reach for a particular section as mental stimulation before heading off to class. The work Flint has undertaken is not nearly so simple as showing the connections between narrative painting and narrative fiction (though she does that too). Her demonstration of the interplay between art critics' ways of seeing visual representations and the techniques people in literature use to interpret poetry and fiction has, I think, provided new tools for all of us. And – as always in a book of Kate Flint's – the bibliography is simply extraordinary.

Note: Review by S. Mitchell (2002) originally appeared in *English Literature in Transition*, 45(1), 76-79. Reprinted with permission of the editor.