

THE PRAGMATICS OF POSITIVE POLITENESS IN THE BOOK REVIEW

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ABSTRACT. *In today's academic world, the book review has become an effective means to present new studies in a scientific field and to assess their validity as relevant contributions to the progress of the discipline. This paper argues that the interpersonal relationship between the communicative participants in this genre constitutes a crucial factor in the construction of discourse. The assessment of a colleague's work necessarily involves criticism—a potentially face-threatening act (FTA)—and therefore calls for the use of politeness strategies to soften and redress the FTA. This paper focuses on compliments, one of the most frequent and interesting politeness strategies involved in the book review. This positive politeness strategy is used with two main purposes: to maintain a harmonious relationship with the reviewee and to mitigate the negative force of the critical statements typically associated with this genre.*

KEYWORDS. *Politeness, face-threatening act, politeness strategies, compliments, evaluative language.*

RESUMEN. *En el mundo académico actual, el género de la reseña crítica puede considerarse un medio efectivo para presentar los nuevos estudios realizados en un campo determinado y valorar su contribución al progreso de la disciplina. En este artículo, proponemos que la relación interpersonal entre los participantes comunicativos en este género es un factor fundamental en la construcción del discurso. En efecto, la valoración del trabajo de un colega investigador supone un acto potencial contra la imagen que necesita ser mitigado mediante el uso de estrategias de cortesía. Entre las más frecuentes e interesantes en la reseña crítica analizaremos las alabanzas, estrategia de cortesía positiva empleada con dos propósitos principales: mantener una relación de solidaridad con el autor revisado y mitigar la fuerza negativa de las críticas asociadas a este género.*

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Cortesía, acto contra la imagen, estrategias de cortesía, alabanzas, lenguaje evaluativo.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the use and function of complimenting strategies in the book review. It is argued that the interpersonal relationship between the

communicative participants in this genre—the writer and the reviewee—is a crucial factor which determines the construction of the discourse as a whole and accounts for the important role played by politeness phenomena in the genre.

In the book review, the writer evaluates the work of a fellow researcher according to various criteria, such as adequate treatment of the subject, usefulness for the prospective reader and possible future applications. Since this task often entails criticism—a negatively affective speech act which also constitutes a potentially face-threatening act (FTA)—mitigation strategies become necessary in order to attenuate its unwelcome effects on the reviewee and make the criticism more palatable. Thus, criticism is usually combined with an attempt to maintain social harmony and solidarity with the reviewee. This can be achieved by means of positive politeness strategies such as compliments, which redress the FTAs—criticisms and suggestions for improvement—performed in the review.

Amongst the most interesting studies on the use of complimenting strategies in review texts, the research carried out by Johnson and Yang (1990) and Johnson (1992) is worth highlighting. These studies basically focus on the use of complimenting strategies in peer-review texts written by graduate students. According to these authors, review texts represent a very important part of academic life, and the interpersonal relation between the main participants shapes the resulting discourse. In writing a review, critical essential goals are to be combined with interpersonal social goals. Therefore, the use of polite language and complimenting strategies becomes crucial in order to balance criticism and maintain a harmonious relationship with the reviewee.

According to Johnson, two types of FTAs can be distinguished in a review text: the global FTA—the whole review is regarded as a potentially face-threatening act since it involves criticism and suggestions for improvement—and specific FTAs—individual criticisms and suggestions for revision. In an attempt to be both conscientious and considerate in their reviews, most writers generally adopt a polite interpersonal attitude in their discourse, which calls for the use of politeness strategies such as compliments in order to redress both types of FTAs: “The need for both types of redress to soften criticisms, and the need to build and maintain rapport, helps account not only for the extensive use of compliments in the review texts, but for their discourse patterning as well”. (Johnson 1992: 54).

Therefore, compliments are considered to be positive politeness strategies addressed towards the hearer’s positive face and their function in review texts is twofold: on the one hand, to establish social solidarity and, on the other hand, to redress an FTA.

Belcher’s (1995) study of book reviews is also of interest since it includes the use of politeness strategies as friendly persuasion. According to Belcher, the positive commentary which regularly precedes negative criticisms aims to soften the force of the face-threatening speech act characteristic of the book review.

In her analysis, Belcher refers to Johnson and Roen’s study (1992) on peer review texts whose authors, graduate students, commonly redress a specific FTA by combining positive comments with negative remarks: the so-called *good news/bad news pairing*

strategy. At the global level, however, writers tend to frame the review by regularly employing opening and closing statements aimed to soften the global FTA. Softening strategies can thus be found both at the global and at the local levels. And, in Belcher's words: "It appears, in fact, that the more damning the intended criticism, the more extravagant the prefatory praise will be" (Belcher 1995: 147). On many occasions, the reviewer feels obliged to conclude the review with a positive, diplomatic comment even when its general tone has been basically negative. However, "such positive closing comments do not transform negative overall estimates of a work into positive estimates". (Belcher 1995: 148).

With the exception of these authors, the study of the book review from a pragmatic perspective has attracted little attention in recent years in comparison with other academic genres such as the research article and the abstract. However, this genre constitutes a rich and interesting field for the study of politeness phenomena in academic discourse, as the present paper attempts to demonstrate.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework of the study reported here includes, on the one hand, Halliday's functional view of language and, on the other hand, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Johnson's study on peer-review texts:

2.1. According to Halliday (1985), language serves three functions: an ideational function, for the expression of logical and experiential meaning; an interpersonal function, to interact with others and to set up relationships; and a textual function, as a means of organising and constructing a text. This paper focuses basically on the interpersonal function of language and on how it is expressed through compliments in the critical text. In the construction of an effective review, both ideational and interpersonal functions must be accomplished: on the one hand, the ideational function refers to the cognitive judgements expressed in the description and evaluation of a recently published book. On the other hand, the interpersonal function refers to the relationship established between the participants in the genre and, in this sense, compliments are used to establish, maintain and consolidate social relationships.

2.2. One of the most important concepts in Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model is the concept of *face*, which is defined as a person's public self-image, "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 66). These authors argue that "certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 70), and distinguish two types of face-threatening acts: those that threaten negative face, that is, the hearer's desire not to be impeded upon and to have freedom of action, and those which threaten positive face, that is, the hearer's desire to be liked and approved of.

In order to avoid an FTA or to redress its effects, speakers use two kinds of politeness strategies:

- a) positive politeness strategies, addressed towards the hearer's positive face.
- b) negative politeness strategies, addressed towards the hearer's negative face.

Compliments must be considered positive politeness strategies addressed towards the hearer's positive face, that is, a person's desire to be approved of by others. Within this framework, Johnson (1992) states that a compliment "works as a kind of 'social accelerator', indicating a desire to establish social solidarity" (Johnson 1992: 54), and defines a compliment in the following terms:

[A compliment is defined] to include positive evaluative comments about the paper under review (the product), about the writer of the paper (the addressee), about the act or process of writing the paper (the writing process), and about the impact of the paper on the reader (rhetorical effect). In short, a compliment is a positive comment that attributes credit to the writer of the paper for some valued characteristic, skill, or act. (Johnson 1992: 55-6).

Following Johnson, two general types of complimenting strategies can be distinguished: those redressing specific FTAs, and those redressing the global FTA:

1. Strategies for redressing specific FTAs:

- 1.1. A good news/bad news pairing strategy: pair/combine a compliment (a positive comment) with a specific FTA (criticism or suggestion) to soften its force.
- 1.2. A good news/bad news chunking strategy: pair a compliment with a string of specific FTAs to mitigate their force.
- 1.3. A compliment-as-rationale strategy: use a compliment as a persuasive rationale for a suggestion.

2. Strategies for redressing the global FTA at the broadest discourse level, also called *higher order politeness strategies*:

- 2.1. Opening strategy: open the review with a compliment to establish a favourable social atmosphere within which the global FTA will not offend. The extensive use of this opening-compliment strategy is consistent with the claim that "openings and closings are the most ritualized parts of discourse [and that compliments] tend to occur at the openings of speech events" (Johnson 1992: 66).
- 2.2. Closing strategy: close the review with a compliment to maintain the solidarity framework created by an opening strategy and continue redressing the global FTA.

Drawing on these studies, the purpose of this paper is to identify and analyse the complimenting strategies used in the book review for social purposes, namely to maintain a harmonious relationship with the reviewee and to mitigate the negative

critical statements usually associated with the genre. Unlike previous studies, the book reviews analysed here have been written by experts in the field. Therefore, a second objective of this study is to determine whether professional reviewers make use of the same positive politeness strategies as non-expert writers, such as graduate students.

3. THE STUDY

The corpus analysed in the present paper comprises a total of 25 book reviews, which have been taken from three of the most cited academic publications (Crookes 1986) within the field of linguistics: *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*, *Applied Linguistics* and *TESOL Quarterly*. These journals are considered to be renowned and prestigious publications in the linguistic community as an effective means to present and expound new knowledge and thus contribute to the general progress of the discipline.

The period of publication of the selected texts is recent—from 1994 to 1998—and their average length ranges from 500 to 1500 words. Some publications, such as *TESOL Quarterly*, include a section entitled *Information for contributors*, in which the editors give directions regarding not only the general content of the reviews submitted for publication, but also their length: “Reviews should provide a descriptive and evaluative summary and a brief discussion of the significance of the work in the context of current theory and practice. Submissions should generally be no longer than 500 words”. (*TESOL Quarterly* 29, 1: 214).

The book reviews were first analysed in terms of their rhetorical structure in order to establish the communicative function fulfilled by every section of the review. The rhetorical division was carried out following Swales’s (1990) and Bhatia’s (1993) model of genre analysis, which postulates that there is an inevitable connection between the communicative purpose of a genre and its cognitive structure. According to this theory, the defining factor of genre is the communicative purpose it tends to fulfil, which is reflected in its generic cognitive structure. This structure determines in its turn the organisational regularities typical of the genre, which reflect the strategies employed by the members of the discourse community in the construction and interpretation of the genre in order to achieve their communicative goals. Once the basic rhetorical divisions of the book reviews had been established, the use of complimenting strategies was studied. Following Johnson (1992), a distinction was made between strategies which redress specific FTAs and those redressing the global FTA.

4. COMPLIMENTING STRATEGIES

Two general types of complimenting strategies can be distinguished in the book review: those redressing specific FTAs and those redressing the global FTA (Johnson 1992):

4.1. *Individual strategies for redressing specific FTAs*

The combination of a compliment with an individual FTA or a succession of specific FTAs to mitigate their negative force constitutes one of the most frequent politeness strategies used in the book review. The positive, face-enhancing information conveyed by the compliment contributes to setting up a favourable context for the specific FTAs performed in the review text.

The juxtaposition of criticism with praise is generally realised by means of a very frequent syntactic pattern which can be considered typical in the book review: a contrastive structure introduced by a concessive subordinator (such as *although* and *while*), an adversative coordinator (such as *but*) or an adverbial concessive conjunct (such as *nonetheless* and *however*). By using this contrastive structure, the reviewer is able to point out the weaknesses of the book in a balanced way, which helps preserve the social face of the reviewees before their peers. Similarly, evaluatively negative sentences are often combined with sentences of clarification, usually introduced by an adverbial concessive conjunct (*nonetheless*, *however*, etc.).

In the following lines, illustrative examples of the positive politeness strategies used in order to redress specific FTAs are offered:

4.1.1. Combination of a compliment with an individual FTA to soften its force:

Example 1: “On the other hand, readers well versed in these matters will perhaps find the book *a less than satisfying one, albeit a positive contribution* in general to the field of academic writing”. (*ESP* 15, 2: 170)

Example 2: “The self-assessments, *themselves welcome elements*, may be *problematic* in regard to their checklist formats”. (*ESP* 16, 3: 250)

Example 3: “In this area lies Pennycook’s *originality* with a particular intellectual debt to Foucault, *though* I felt that a consistent refusal to consider theories of ideology as anything except ‘false consciousness’ was *a curiously perverse and theoretically impoverishing denial* of modern developments in Ideologiekritik”. (*Applied Linguistics* 17, 2: 258)

Example 4: “Third, the book is *reader-oriented*, as it helps its reader through each chapter (introducing, summarizing); *but* it is very *unlikely that any beginner will understand* the relation between the main claims made in the introduction” (*Applied Linguistics* 17, 2: 262)

Example 5: “*While* the pedagogical implications of their research are *clear*, the results are *not particularly encouraging*”. (*Applied Linguistics* 18, 3: 406)

Example 6: “*Although* chapters on motivation [...] *reflect current knowledge* and areas of focus in the field, the approach is *fairly traditional*”. (*TESOL Quarterly* 29, 2: 391)

Example 7: “In doing so, they are able to construct *a fairly coherent account* of the complex problem of writing. In the process of legitimizing the applied linguistic

perspective, *however*, they may *have oversimplified* the complexity of disciplinary contexts in which the development of writing has been situated". (*TESOL Quarterly* 31, 2: 376)

4.1.2. Juxtaposition of a compliment with a string of specific FTAs, which contributes to setting up a favourable context in order to mitigate their force:

Example 8: "As a whole, this collection offers *interesting data and discussion* about gender and ethnicity. *However*, at times, some of the articles feel *outdated*. [...] In addition, the structure of the book *artificially* separates studies on gender, and ethnicity. *Only a few of the chapters do a good job* of discussing the interrelated and overlapping nature of gender and ethnic identities or the relationship between socioeconomic class, gender and ethnicity. The chapters that critique other articles in the book are strong and *more of this kind of discussion would have added* to the book". (*TESOL Quarterly* 29, 2: 399)

Example 9: "The organization within the chapters is *a heroic attempt* at simplifying some very complex issues. *Unfortunately*, the numerous headings, subheadings, and sub-subheadings result in *an information-processing nightmare* and serve to *confuse* rather than guide the reader. *In addition*, Ellis *does not provide adequate information* on data analysis, interpretation, and different methodological approaches—limitations of considerable importance to beginning students. *Finally*, despite claims of objectivity, Ellis *quite obviously prefers* certain theorists over others". (*TESOL Quarterly* 29, 3: 603)

Example 10: "Although both volumes are *well-constructed*, we find *difficulties* with some of the activities. The grammar drills, for example, *can be critiqued* for the usual reasons. Many of the earlier open-ended activities in the first volume may also *need supplementation*, depending on the level of the students, since they require only single or multiple one-sentence responses. The self-assessments, themselves welcome elements, may be *problematic* in regard to their checklist formats [...]. Finally, some of the more interactional and open-ended activities are still *rather narrowly defined and constrained*; several activities surrounding the video segments, for example, focus largely on details of the dialogue". (*ESP* 16, 3: 250)

4.1.3. Combination of a compliment with a suggestion. In this case, the positive comment functions as a persuasive rationale which justifies the suggestion for improvement that follows:

Example 11: "This is a *valuable* observation that this reviewer *wishes* Bazerman *had explored further*". (*ESP* 15, 3: 243-4)

Example 12: "Gottlieb's book is *a clear and complete* history of language policy in modern Japan. *One wishes, though*, that she *had broadened* her focus just a bit [...]. Both *might have provided useful* comparisons and contrasts with the Japanese case". (*Applied Linguistics* 18, 3: 404)

4.2. *General strategies for redressing the global FTA*

So far, this paper has focused on the use and function of compliments at the sentence level. However, reviewers also employ politeness strategies at the discourse level in order to redress a global FTA. These strategies basically consist of surrounding criticisms with positive comments either at the beginning—the introduction section—or at the end—the conclusion section—of the book review. According to Johnson (1992), surrounding the global FTA with positive comments contributes to creating a socially appropriate atmosphere, a solidarity framework within which the global FTA will not offend.

Two general strategies have been distinguished:

4.2.1. Opening strategy: the review opens with a compliment before presenting criticisms and suggestions for improvement. These compliments function as positive politeness strategies since they establish a solidarity framework for softening and redressing the global FTA and, as Johnson suggests, they may be considered to present a quasi-obligatory status. Some examples from the corpus are the following:

Example 13: “Despite some imperfections, *Getting Ahead* is a training package which *stands out* in terms of its *diverse and engaging* activities”. (ESP 13, 2: 190-91)

Example 14: “Belcher and Braine *have succeeded* in producing a comprehensive volume of articles addressing *pertinent issues* in the teaching of academic writing to both graduate and undergraduate NNS students. [...]. *This excellent collection* provides the ESL/ESP practitioner with *carefully conducted research on current issues* as well as details of new classroom innovations emanating from the study of academic writing. Equally important, this is a volume that L1 writing specialists should be acquainted with since *it admirably presents* many recent advances in L2 scholarship on academic writing”. (ESP 15, 2: 165)

Example 15: “Bazerman’s *Constructing Experience* raises, and for the most part *lucidly addresses*, practical and theoretical questions currently circulating in the social study of written communication”. (ESP 15, 3: 243)

Example 16: “*This goal is served admirably* through a *purposeful mixture* of studies representing the major research paradigms operating in applied linguistics”. (ESP 16, 1: 77)

Example 17: “*Varieties of English* *stands alone* among textbooks that aim to integrate content and language teaching. [...] By focusing on an array of social situations, the text *illuminates* many introductory linguistic concepts, more ordinarily found in the syllabi of introductory linguistics courses”. (ESP 16, 2: 153)

Example 18: “Holliday’s book *effectively bridges this gap* in L2 methods scholarship”. (ESP 16, 2, 156)

Example 19: “This volume is *a rich and varied collection* of studies in academic writing, *useful* not only to the researcher but to the serious ESP practitioner”. (ESP 16, 3: 245)

Example 20: “It is not easy to find good books dealing with pronunciation for teacher education, yet here is one that does so *with breadth and clarity*. [...] Very few pronunciation books indeed manage as *effectively* as this one to embrace both theory and practice with clarity, moreover *in a reflective, awareness-raising manner* that is *maximally helpful* to both teachers and teacher educators”. (*Applied Linguistics* 18, 3: 397)

Example 21: “The Study of Second Language Acquisition *is one of the few books* in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) *to give a comprehensive overview* of learner language and its study. *The breadth of information* contained within this book is *commendable*, and *it is without a doubt a valuable and worthwhile resource* for libraries, serious scholars of SLA, and teachers of second languages”. (*TESOL Quarterly* 29, 3: 602)

However, in some cases, the writer offers a rather balanced opinion in the introduction to the review, combining positive remarks with objections and criticisms, as the following example shows:

Example 22: “This book, in honour of Geoffrey Leech, *has the pros and cons* of many Festschriften. [...] The book is *an excellent sampler* of the kinds of facts about English which are not derivable from intuition, but are discoverable using new technology. *But ultimately*, it remains *a series of short articles, mostly good, readable introductions* to the field, *though* several case studies are *rather lightweight*, and their implications for linguistic theory *are not clearly brought out*”. (*Applied Linguistics* 18, 2: 240)

4.2.2. Closing strategy: the review closes with a compliment to maintain rapport and continue redressing the global FTA. The following examples, all taken from the conclusion section of the review texts analysed, may serve to illustrate this:

Example 23: “*Lastly, lest this review sound entirely negative*, I should like to state that the presentation of the book is *clean and professional*, and that the cross-cultural awareness elements are *an excellent idea*, since they open up *an interesting new dimension* for learners of English that has hitherto rarely been examined in EFL textbooks”. (*ESP* 13, 1: 104)

Example 24: “Based upon an evaluation of the *Learner’s Book, Getting Ahead* appears to be *a well-designed package to help* pre-intermediate students get ahead in their business communication skills”. (*ESP* 13, 2: 192)

Example 25: “Belcher and Braine’s volume will provide any scholar of academic writing—whether L1 or L2—with *an excellent introduction to recent advances* in areas that ESL writing experts consider important to the teaching and learning of academic writing”. (*ESP* 15, 2: 168)

Example 26: “*By and large*, however, readers will likely feel that, in its passionate advocacy of world majority student writers, Fox’s book is *a positive addition* to the field of academic writing”. (*ESP* 15, 2: 171)

Example 27: “*All in all*, the book provides a bird’s eye view of some important issues in sociorhetorical approaches to writing. Bazerman *effectively addresses*

problematic issues and concepts in writing while never losing sight of the social, political, and historical contexts in which they occur. Those studying writing in its varied social/disciplinary contexts *would do well to seek further inspiration* from this volume”. (ESP 15, 3: 245)

Example 28: “Even if that happens, the book will continue to be read, for its careful approach to comparing disciplines, and for its sense of commitment to what academic writing can do”. (ESP 16, 1: 76)

Example 29: “Despite its weaknesses on the linguistic front, this is a very useful book for everyone interested in international and intercultural communication. It contains an abundance of relevant information, it is well structured and the writing is very transparent”. (Applied Linguistics 17, 2: 266)

Example 30: “Although not the most appropriate book for beginning students, The Study of Second Language Acquisition nevertheless accomplishes a momentous task and is particularly useful to L2 teachers as well as being an excellent research source”. (TESOL Quarterly 29, 3: 603)

Example 31: “Despite the problem inherent in any attempt to unify multiple disciplinary perspectives, Theory and Practice of Writing is a welcome addition to the growing body of writing scholarship. With an integrative survey of writing research and practical suggestions for teaching, this book also makes a good introductory textbook for teachers who are new to writing scholarship as well as a useful reference for teachers who are faced with immediate problems of writing instruction”. (TESOL Quarterly 31, 2: 376-7)

Example 32: “Nevertheless, the wealth of historical, cultural, and geosociolinguistic insights far outweighs any questionable features. In short, Crystal’s book is an eloquent, sensibly written testimony that the global spread of English is a fact. Whether English is here to stay permanently as a global language is something for mid- or late 21st-century citizens to say. Meanwhile, we can rejoice that his fascinating account is available”. (TESOL Quarterly 31, 4: 808)

However, there are cases in which the reviewer performs no redressive action and insists on restating his objections and suggestions for improvement in the closing lines of the review. The following examples may serve to illustrate this point. In the first one, the opening compliment is immediately followed by a string of criticisms, duly hedged by means of modal elements (the semi-auxiliary verb *to seem*, the modal verb *would* and the modal adverb expressing conviction *certainly*) and partially mitigated by the positive closing noun phrase (*this important book*):

Example 33: “The major value of this book is in its demonstration of the worldliness of English and critiques of the discourse of EIL. One obvious objection to the pedagogic proposals made is that they seem excessively intellectual and oriented toward tertiary students. I am sure the author would agree they don’t have to be like that. I understand that some of the author’s work done in Hong Kong along these lines may

be published soon and *it would certainly make a valuable supplement* to this more theoretical intervention. I feel the desirability of such a project is unarguable, and my understanding of these principles has been greatly deepened by reading and reflecting on *this important book*". (*Applied Linguistics* 17, 2: 261)

In the next example, the conclusion section opens with a general positive comment, which is immediately followed by the writer's objections to the book as a whole—specifically, the failure to fulfil its objectives:

Example 34: "In summary, the book presents many interesting facts, but there is a long way to go before we know their real significance. Svartvik quotes (pp. 11-12) a criticism of corpus linguistics that there is a lack of 'falsifications of major theoretical claims made by chalk-and-blackboard linguistics... The time has come for making bolder theoretical and methodological claims'. I agree. I think they can be made. They are implied here. But they are not argued explicitly". (Applied Linguistics 18, 2: 242-3)

A similar pattern can be observed in the following excerpt, in which the conclusion opens with general praising of the book, but continues with criticisms and suggestions for improvement, tactfully introduced by means of modal features (the verbs *would* and *should*, and the adverb *perhaps*) and downtoners (*a little more*):

Example 35: "Overall, then, a stimulating, topical approach to the subject, one which brings phonology to life for teacher and educator alike. My only minor criticism is that I would have liked the authors to develop their discussion [...] in relation to English as an international language. This is clearly a progressive book in that, for example, it encourages reflection and takes account of areas such as social psychology that are not traditionally addressed in pronunciation books. Since international is clearly the way English is going, then it follows that a progressive, innovative book of this sort should perhaps concern itself a little more with the role of pronunciation in international contexts [...]. No doubt the authors will give greater consideration to this issue in the second edition, where the extra insights available to them as 'non-native' speakers themselves will prove invaluable". (Applied Linguistics 18, 3: 398)

In the next example, the conclusion section of the review has been devoted to complimenting the book, but the closing clause insists on its shortcomings, establishing a sharp contrast with the positive tone of the previous lines:

Example 36: "In this short review, it is difficult to do justice to this important volume. Suffice it to say that it more than meets its goals: for researchers, it provides models, literature reviews, and a variety of questions for analysis; for teachers, there are useful suggestions for pedagogy, either stated or implied. For all of us, it raises important questions about academic writing—though it does not always answer them". (ESP 16, 3: 247)

Having explored the use and function of each type of redressing strategy in the book review, we have also considered it necessary to analyse their linguistic realisation. As for the strategies which redress a particular FTA or individual strategies, the

juxtaposition of criticism and praise determines the linguistic elements employed: concessive subordinators, adversative coordinators and concessive conjuncts, which enable the reviewer to establish a contrast between negative critical remarks and positive comments.

As for the strategies which redress the global FTA or general strategies, those placed at the beginning of the review-opening strategies-are characterised by the use of declarative sentences which contain a high percentage of positive evaluative language-especially adjectives and adverbs-aimed to provide a favourable overview of the book. The closing strategies, placed at the end of the review, are generally introduced by a concluding adverb or adverbial phrase such as *all in all*, *by and large*, *in conclusion*, *in summary*, *lastly*, *overall*, which indicates the concluding character of the statements that follow. Concessive clauses introduced by *despite* or *in spite of*, followed by nouns such as *weaknesses*, *imperfections* or *problems*, are also typical of these closing strategies, and are used to relativise the negative comments stated in the core of the review-the evaluation section-and give prominence to the essentially positive character of the concluding statements.

Finally, it is interesting to make a brief reference to the distribution of complimenting strategies according to textual macrostructure, that is, in the various rhetorical sections of the book review. With this purpose, we have taken into account the distinction between individual strategies and general strategies. In the first case, criticisms and suggestions for improvement are generally presented in the evaluation section, which usually combines negative remarks with compliments. In the second case, the writer tends to frame the review text with positive comments, which appear both at the beginning and at the end of the book review, that is, in the introduction and the conclusion sections.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, the book review is a potentially face-threatening act since it basically involves the assessment of a colleague's work. In writing an effective review text, both ideational and interpersonal functions must be accomplished: on the one hand, reviewers express cognitive judgements in their description and evaluation of the book; on the other hand, in order to perform this task, writers must establish a harmonious relationship with the reviewee and strike a balance between, on the one hand, their compliments and praising comments and, on the other, their criticisms and suggestions for improvement. This can be achieved by means of politeness strategies.

This paper has focused on the use and function of compliments in the book review, a genre which represents a valuable source of data on complimenting phenomena. Compliments are positive politeness strategies which function to establish solidarity with the reviewee and to soften the FTAs performed in the review text, both at the sentence level and at the discourse level. Both non-expert and professional reviewers are aware of the interpersonal relationship which characterises the genre and therefore make

an extensive use of compliments to soften and redress the negative force of their critical statements.

In conclusion, politeness strategies play a very important role in the genre of the book review. Therefore, it would be interesting to pursue an analysis of the use and function of negative politeness strategies in the review text, paying special attention to modality and hedging, in order to shed new light on the interpersonal dynamics which characterise this important academic genre in today's scientific world.

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