Managing evaluation: Criticism in two academic review genres

Abstract:

Academic blogs are becoming increasingly frequent, visible and important in both disciplinary and 'outreach' communication, offering a space for scholars and interested publics to discuss and evaluate research. Like the more traditional book review, blog responses require writers to engage and assess the ideas presented in another, public, text, but bloggers face criticism from both lay and academic readers in ways that may be unfamiliar to them. In this paper we consider how far blog responses are an 'academic review genre' like the familiar book review, and compare how writers construct criticism in the two genres. Based on two corpora of 36 book reviews and 270 blog comments, we examine the frequency, form and focus of criticism exploring how the constraints and affordances of each genre contribute to very different evaluative contexts. We show that the medium has a significant impact on the strategies writers use and that blog comments both reflect the directness and informality of online communication while respecting some of the conventions of academic engagement. The results contribute to our understanding of how context influences rhetorical choices and may be valuable to those participating in both blogs and review genres.

Keywords: book review, blog comment, critical acts, mitigation devices

1. Introduction

Evaluation is at the heart of academic activity. Despite the relatively impersonal facade of scholarly discourse, academics are constantly weighing up evidence, assessing sources and challenging claims. Many of these evaluations, of course, are critical, in the sense of making negative judgements, as writers seek to carve out a space for their work and claim authority for their ideas in the crowded marketplace of intellectual debate. Criticism, however, is not only a means of promoting personal research agendas, but a key factor in advancing scientific research by testing interpretations, highlighting flaws, stimulating innovation and contributing to the progression and refinement of new knowledge. But while commonplace in

1

research articles, nowhere is criticism more apparent than in the family of *academic review genres* which are discourses written with the explicit purpose of evaluating the research, the texts and the contributions of fellow academics. Review genres include book reviews, book review articles, review articles, book blurbs and literature reviews in research articles (Hyland & Diani, 2009). Collectively they play a significant role in scholarship as venues where writers are able to argue their viewpoints, signal their allegiances, and display their credibility (Shaw, 2009; Giannoni, 2006)

While the book review is perhaps the most recognisable example of an academic review genre, it represents a prototype of a family rather than a set of fixed criteria for identification of the category. Comments on published academic blogs represent a relative newcomer to this family. Blogs offer writers an alternative (or supplementary) means of communicating academic research to peers and the lay public and allow readers to evaluate and respond to those posts immediately and publicly. As a result, they often encompass a more heterogeneous variety of producers (e.g., researchers, laypeople, and scientific journalists), and audiences (with varieties of insider expertise) than established reviews, but we recognise in them a single genre which shares sufficient similarities to comprise a class of communicative events within review genres. Both book reviews and blog comments have an analogous social purpose and relationship to a source text, allowing writers to express their reactions towards academic posts and to construct their own, often opposing, views. While blogs operate in a different interactional environment, they nevertheless contribute to what Lindholm-Romantschuk (1998) refers to as 'the public evaluations of research', supporting both the manufacture of knowledge and the social cohesiveness of academic life.

Perhaps the most striking differences between blog responses and the more prototypical reviews is that, like academic blogs themselves, comments are embryonic and evolving as a genre. While the sites we used to collect these posts are moderated, the comments lack the established interpersonal conventions of other academic genres. Here, then, we find linguistic features typical of the more personal and dialogic interactions which characterise debate on the internet, with more recognisably academic commentary following scholarly norms of argument and rebuttal (e.g. Luzón, 2013). We hesitate, however, to distinguish comments into different genres by their style and many of our examples contain both registers in the same post. Instead, we prefer to see any variations in form or force as comprising the realisation of a single, admittedly developing, genre which is emerging to play an

increasingly important and visible role in academic argument. Here is a platform for disciplinary members to engage in community debates and for outsiders to participate in discussions from which they have traditionally been excluded.

Public criticism, however, carries considerable risks. It can represent a direct challenge not only to a writer but to a broad range of readers who have accepted the contested claims, and perhaps incorporated them into their own research (Myers, 1989). Criticisms in review genres, moreover, do not simply respond to a general body of more-or-less impersonal literature, but engage with particular texts, and therefore their authors. It is the particular ideas in a book or a blog post that are reviewed and disparaged, so writers often strive to side-step personal attacks and avoid antagonizing colleagues by balancing critique with collegiality. Criticism, then, is often mitigated, softened by linguistic devices such as hedges, conditionals, questions and so on to maintain a positive affinity with peers (Shaw, 2009; Hyland, 2006).

In this paper, we explore the focus and mitigation of criticism by examining similar sized corpora of 36 academic book reviews and 270 blog comments from Sociology. Our study helps shed light on the critical acts employed by conventional and web-mediated review genres, influenced by the affordances of immediacy and audience. We address the following questions:
1. (1) What do writers choose to criticise in academic book reviews and blog comments?
2. (2) To what extent is criticism mitigated in these two genres?
3. (3) What differences are there in the uses of mitigated criticism in the two genres?

2. Being critical in published academic writing

Criticism, while stimulating research and allowing writers to distinguish their ideas from others, is intrinsically face threatening, with the potential to undermine a writer's sense of worth and their desire to be recognised (Hyland, 2004, p.45). As a result, criticism of other researchers or their work is often toned down by hedges and other redressive actions following conventions of academic engagement. Mitigation is thus beneficial to scholarly interaction, allowing criticism to be conducted in an acceptable, impersonal and collegial way (Myers, 1989).

2.1 Criticism in book reviews

The book review is a crucial site of disciplinary engagement, contributing to the examination and visibility of scientific knowledge. It contributes in a very direct and explicit way to the ongoing process of evaluating and negotiating new disciplinary knowledge. It is written with the purpose of offering a personal evaluation of another's research, the contribution of a fellow academic, and therefore judgements can carry significant social consequences, representing a direct challenge to a specific author. The review thus involves careful negotiation, employing an array of strategies to minimise threats to the author and the community of which both the reviewer and writer, and perhaps all interested readers, are members. Mitigated criticism therefore provides community members with useful information and a personal take on published books, influencing decisions about what is read and perhaps celebrated and eventually cited. While a damaging review may not kill a career, it can damage sales and an author's confidence. More positively, writing a review offers writers an alternative forum to set out their views on an issue without engaging in the long cycle of inquiry, review and revision involved in a full-length paper (Hyland, 2004).

Mitigated criticism in academic book reviews has not only been shown to be a key component of the genre (e.g. Hyland & Diani, 2009) but has also been approached from different perspectives. From a cross-linguistic/cultural standpoint, Salager-Meyer and Alcaraz Ariza (2004) have shown that criticisms are mitigated more frequently in Spanish and French medical book reviews than in those written in English. Itakura and Tsui (2011) suggest that the greater use of mitigation in Japanese reviews compared with those in English is the result of cultural decisions. Giannoni (2006) has observed that critical evaluations in both English and Italian economics book reviews are often mitigated and expressed implicitly while Diani (2015), studying history reviews, found Italian reviewers showed a clear preference for mitigated criticism, while their English counterparts were more direct in their criticism.

Research has also shown that the mitigation of criticism may vary between hard and soft disciplines. Hyland (2004), for example, discovered criticism was more frequent than praise in the social sciences as opposed to the physical sciences. Hyland (2006) found hedges to be used extensively as a pragmatic strategy to soften critical evaluations in three contrasting disciplines. It also seems that mitigation may have become more important over time with today's book reviews far more extensively hedged than in the past (Salager-Meyer et al.,

2007). This, of course, reflects changing academic norms and writers' awareness of the importance of measured criticism as a means of persuading readers of one's perspective.

Reviews, in other words, are rhetorically and interactionally complex and a good review needs not only to offer a critical and insightful perspective, drawing on considerable knowledge of the field, but also to respond to the demands of a delicate interactional situation. Mitigated criticism facilitates this.

2.2 Criticism in academic blog comments

Expressions of disagreement are also central to responses to academic blogs. Blogging is a relatively new outlet for academics seeking to take their research to a wider audience. With the aid of software affordances, such as filtering tools for searching and accessing relevant material, hyperlinks to connect with related research work, and the availability of immediate commentary, academic blogging has expanded into an established channel of scholarly communication in both the physical and social sciences. While there are different types of academic blogs (Walker, 2006), the distinctions between them are not always clear and their main purpose is to disseminate information, express academic views or publicise the blogger's research (Efimova & de Moor, 2005; Luzón, 2011). Academic blogs, in fact, have been shown to play an important role in disseminating research to a lay public, allowing writers to engage with their peers on hot issues and to stir and steer public debate with heterogeneous audiences (Bondi, 2018a; Mauranen, 2013).

The online environment creates both the possibility for a wider, unknown audience, but also for instant feedback and engagement in a virtual conversation (Yus, 2015), giving experts and lay people alike the chance to respond to these research posts. More than a blogger-reader dialogue, of course, blogs often become a polylogue, with several readers participating and engaging in exchanges with each other (Bolander, 2012). Compared with writing a book review, however, blog responders possess less certainty of who will read their posts and how much knowledge these readers will share with them and as a result may conceptualise their readers and take them, and their knowledge, into account in different ways (Puschmann, 2013). Thus Bondi (2018b) found that researchers responding in economics blogs expressed agreement and disagreement in ways ranging from well-structured claims backed by arguments to strong outright disagreement. Nor are the conventions of the genre in any way fully established and norms of engagement and criticism are likely to be heavily influenced

by those of the medium, with greater unpredictability and more evaluatively charged encounters.

Previous studies have found that disagreement and hostility are commonplace in online environments such as forums, newsgroups, online newspapers and blogs (e.g. Angouri & Tsekiga, 2010) with the expression of conflict ranging from disagreement to sarcasm and personal attacks (e.g. Bolander, 2012; Neurauter, 2011). In academic blog discussions, Luzón (2013) discovered a high incidence of conflictual acts extending from mild criticism to more severe bald-on-record disparagement. She concluded:

> The conflict developing in blog discussions could be explained by considering both the purpose of the genre and the features of the medium and of the community interacting through such discussions.   (Luzón, 2013, p. 117).

This, then, is a new polylogue context with distinct interactive patterns which appear to differ from both other academic genres (Mauranen, 2013) and from other online genres (Luzón, 2012a).

The language of critical evaluation has also been explored. Luzón (2012b), for example, identified the targets of evaluation as well as the types of evaluative adjectives in blog entries and comments. She discovered three popular adjective categories in comments, i.e. *accuracy, quality,* and *interest*, which were used to praise the blogger and express agreement, or mild disagreement. Commenters chose to combine negative adjectival evaluation with hedging devices to express mild disagreement and constructive criticism. The study showed commenters following general principles of everyday politeness but deploying linguistic features typical of personal, informal, and dialogic interaction while criticising research posts.

But while Luzón's work sheds light on criticism in blogs and the influence of rhetorical contexts on writers' choices of evaluative strategies, no research has addressed the different uses of criticism in academic book reviews and blog comments. Despite differences in their target texts, their purpose is similar: both the book reviews and blogs provide opportunities for individuals to evaluate academic research. Blogs, however, blur the distinction between research science and public science, between disciplinary communication and external communication and between formality and proximity and we are interested to discover if these diverse contexts and readerships lead to the display of different discursive

practices. We address this gap by exploring the specific foci of criticism and the mitigation devices employed in academic book reviews and blog comments. We hope this will illuminate how blog comments convey criticism and shed some light on their place within the system of academic review genres. First, we describe our corpora and methods.

3. Data and analysis

3.1 The texts

We started by compiling two corpora comprising 36 book reviews and 270 blog comments ensuring that:

1) the texts were in the same academic discipline: sociology

2) were published between 2016-2019

3) had similar total word counts.

Specifically, two criteria were used to select the book reviews:

> (1) The reviews were taken from 6 prestigious international sociological journals with strict peer-reviewed process (see Appendix).

> (2) Only reviews of single-authored books were selected to avoid any potential differences in the strength or focus of the criticisms expressed (e.g. invective may be harsher if reviewers know it is less 'personal' and shared among several co-authors).

These criteria yielded 125 book reviews in total from all the six journals, and we selected 6 from each journal using a randomising formula. Altogether, the book review corpus comprises 36 book reviews with a total of 38,090 running words.

The blog posts were selected from *The Conversation* website, focusing on the *politics and society* field.[1] This site, hosted by the Conversation Media Group and funded by more than 80 UK universities, is one of the world's most influential open sites for the promotion and discussion of academic research issues in the physical and social sciences. It describes itself in this way:

---

[1] The Conversation UK website: https://theconversation.com/uk

> The Conversation is a source of independent news and analysis written by experts and read by a general audience. Our aim is to get good, evidence-based information to the public, for free.
>
> The types of articles we're looking for are ones that explain, or have a different take on, news and current affairs, present interesting new research, or offer analysis of matters in the public interest.

The site claims to be fact-based and editorially independent and all the posts are authored by academics or PhD candidates in universities or research institutions. Writers can only publish on a subject in which they have proven expertise and their submissions undergo strict review by the editors to ensure novelty, interest and readability. They are encouraged to write for readers who are "engaged and intelligent, but most of them are not academics…. imagine you're talking to a clever friend or relative - not a colleague." Debate and dissent are welcomed among readers, but personal attacks, abuse and defamatory language are not tolerated. The website claims that contents are disseminated to more than 22,000 sites worldwide with a global reach of 38.2 million readers each month.

We were interested in collecting responses to popular blogs from *The Conversation* and applied the following criteria:

(1) The post was active at the time of analysis and had attracted more than 20 comments; and
(2) The post contained comments both directed to the original blogger and other commenters.

18 blog posts met these criteria and for each post we randomly chose 15 comments, with 7 comments addressed to the blogger or the blog post and 8 to other commenters. In total, 270 comments of 38,167 words were collected (See Table 1).

Table 1 Corpus size and composition

	Number of texts/comments	**Total number of words**
Book reviews	36	38,090
Blog comments	18*15=270	38,167

3.2 Procedures

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were adopted to analyse the corpora at the global (categories of evaluation) and local (instances of critical mitigation) level.

At the global level, we first read the texts to generate a functional identification of criticism categories in the two corpora, tagging these according to Hyland's (2004) categories of evaluation focus in book reviews. As we worked, we recognised that a categorization system which allowed us to compare critical comments in two very different review contexts meant modifying Hyland's framework to develop several new sub-categories and to merge or delete others (Table 2 shows our model). We omitted the *publishing* category, as there were no cases in either corpus. We renamed the *text* category as *presentation* as this seemed more inclusive and added a *participants* category to better address the blog context. This now includes not only the *author* category from the previous framework, but also other commenters, the general public and the blog commenter himself/herself.

Table 2 Categories of criticism in the two genres (after Hyland, 2004)

Content	(i) General Overall discussion: e.g. coverage, approach, theoretical lens, interest, currency, quality, credibility, relatedness, writing intention (ii) Specific Argument: e.g. insight, coherence, explanatory or descriptive value, terminology understanding, data interpretation, misconception
Style	Exposition: clarity, organization, conciseness, difficulty, readability and editorial judgements, typing mistakes, choice of words.
Readership	Value or relevance for a particular readership, purpose or discipline
Presentation	Extent, relevance and currency of references, the number, usefulness and quality of diagrams, title and sub-title
Participants	(i) Reference to the original author of the book or blog post (ii) Reference to other commenters (iii) Reference to publics (iv) Reference to book reviewer or blog commenter himself/herself

To minimise subjective judgements, both authors were involved in the coding process, with both inter-coder and intra-coder reliability measures implemented. The two authors independently annotated a 40% sample of each corpus.Inter-coder agreement was assessed with the aid of Cohen's kappa statistics for each of the categories of criticism. The results were .98 for general contents, .97 for specific contents, .93 for style, .96 for readership, .97 for presentation, and .94 for participants. Landis and Koch's guidelines (1977) indicate these values show substantive to almost perfect agreement. Disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached. The first author then annotated the rest of the data based on the new category framework and conducted intra-reliability tests by re-categorizing 20% of the cases two weeks after the initial coding. The frequencies of items in each category were then calculated after normalising the results to 10,000 words, to allow for cross-corpora comparisons. The SPSS statistical package (version: IBM SPSS Statistics 24) was used and the statistical significances were analysed with the aid of Student's *t*-test.

At the local level, we identified all the 'critical acts'. We use the term 'critical' in the everyday, rather than analytical sense, as statements of negative evaluation. These acts ranged from a single word to several sentences of sustained argument, but we identified acts according to their function so that one sentence might contain several acts (e.g. *this book is dull, poorly researched and badly-written*). We then extracted and counted all these critical acts as a separate file to examine the mitigation strategies they contained in more detail by comparing them across the two genres. To do this we drew on Hyland's mitigation model, which recognises six types of mitigation (Hyland, 2004; Itakura & Tsui, 2011), and added the category of critical questions after our initial analysis if 30% of the data showed this to be an important category.

- *Praise-criticism pair* such as *despite x, x but y*, is a criticism prefaced by praise that serves to soften the threat of the criticism. Praise is syntactically subordinated to a criticism, but their adjacency serves to create a more balanced comment.
- *Hedging* such as *somewhat, maybe*, is employed to tone down criticisms and create a positive relationship with the reader and the author.
- *Personal responsibility* such as *I think, to my mind*, mitigates criticism by specifying that it represents a personal opinion rather than an objective truth. It acknowledges others may hold alternative views.

- ***Other attribution*** such as *some readers may quibble*. In contrast to personal responsibility this mitigates a criticism by shifting the agent of the comment to others.

- ***Illocutionary signalling*** such as *There are a few missteps here*, alerts the reader to expect a criticism, bracketing negative comment from the flow of a review and refocusing the reader on the act of evaluating, rather than the evaluation itself.

- ***Indirectness*** or 'damning with faint praise', conveys criticism indirectly by setting up a contrast with readers' expectations (e.g. "You might want to borrow this book from the library" can suggest that the book is not worth buying, or "this research would interest some civil servants in the treasury" indicates a limited audience for it).

- ***Critical questions***, or rhetorical questions used to express critical judgements rather than elicit information.

As should be clear from the categorisation, critical acts can be expressed in a variety of ways and this required two kinds of search. An inventory of search items was compiled using previous studies (e.g. Hyland, 2019) and expanded by a thorough reading of the data. Common lexical and phrasal expressions from the mitigation model were then searched with the aid of AntConc (Anthony, 2018). Devices which did not allow an automatic search, such as pairs, other attribution, illocutionary signalling and indirectness, were manually tagged and counted. The two authors then independently annotated a 30% sample of each corpus to ensure that all coded items functioned in the way attributed to them. Inter-coder agreement was assessed adopting Cohen's kappa statistics for all the mitigation devices. The obtained kappa statistics were .98 for praise-criticism pair, .96 for hedging, .98 for personal responsibility, .97 for other attribution, .94 for illocutionary signalling, and .91 for indirectness and .99 for critical questions. According to Landis and Koch's guidelines (1977), these kappa values also showed substantive to almost perfect agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

The first author then coded the rest of the data based on the new framework. Intra-reliability tests were also conducted by the first author re-categorizing 20% of the cases two weeks after the initial coding with full agreement between two categorizations. Finally, we calculated the frequencies of critical acts, together with those that were mitigated, and normalised the results to 1,000 words to allow for cross-corpora comparison. The SPSS statistical package

(version: IBM SPSS Statistics 24) was used and the statistical significances were analysed with the aid of Student's *t*-test. The results are discussed in the following sections.

4. Frequency of criticism in the two genres

At the global level, we found 137 critical acts in the book reviews and 264 in blog comments. This amounted to 3.60 criticisms per 1,000 words in the book reviews compared with 6.92 in the blogs. Table 3 shows the number of critical acts in each genre (per 1,000 words) and the proportion of each which comprised criticism. This divergence partly reflects the fact that reviews tend to include stretches of text which summarize content from the original source not available to the reader while the proximity of the source text makes this move redundant in blog responses. This means that comments are likely to have a higher proportion of evaluative material than reviews, although it does not necessarily mean these will be critical. The comparison, however, is instructive as it offers an impression of the sense that a reader might get of the overall critical character of the texts. Clearly, the blogs are more heavily critical than the book reviews with almost twice as many critical acts, or specific acts of criticism, in the blog comments (log Likelihood =24.20, p<0.0001). Like the book reviews, most of these were mitigated, and the difference is significant (log Likelihood =5.50, p<0.06)

Table 3 Overall criticism in the two genres

	Book reviews	**Blog comments**
Critical acts (per 1,000 words)	3.60	6.92
Proportion of text as criticism	17.30%	28.70%

Looking at the different categories of focus, we find more cases of criticism in all categories in the blog responses (see Table 4).

Table 4 Targets of criticism in the two genres (raw, normed to 1,000 words & percent)

		Book reviews			Blog comments		
		raw	per 1,000 words	%	raw	per 1,000 words	%
Content	General	53	1.39	38.61	104	2.73	39.45
	Specific	61	1.60	44.44	103	2.70	39.02
Style		11	0.29	8.06	22	0.58	8.38
Readership		3	0.08	2.22	4	0.10	1.45
Presentation		5	0.13	3.61	8	0.21	3.03
Participants	Original author	0	0.00	0.00	1	0.03	0.43
	Other commenters	0	0.00	0.00	7	0.18	2.60
	Publics	3	0.08	2.22	10	0.26	3.76
	Self	1	0.03	0.83	5	0.13	1.88
Total		**137**	**3.60**	**100.00**	**264**	**6.92**	**100.00**

Content and style attracted the overwhelming attention of both reviewers and blog commenters with critical evaluations of specific aspects of the ideas or arguments accounting for half of all comments in both genres. The other categories received comparatively less attention and no book reviewer criticised an author. All genre differences were significant except the figures for readership and presentation. This higher critical content can be attributed to the more interactive and evaluative nature of blog commentary as it is a genre which involves a greater variety of players, a more heterogeneous readership, more immediate opportunities for response, and somewhat looser interactional norms than disciplinary-constrained book reviews.

Overall, then, writers' different choices of criticism targets are influenced by different readerships and the constraints of the medium. In the following section, we discuss each target in turn.

5.1 Criticism of content

Most critical evaluations, not surprisingly, addressed content issues, with roughly 80% of all judgments falling into this category in both genres. In total, criticisms of content were significantly more frequent in the blog comments than book reviews (log Likelihood =26.12, p<0.0001) with more cases of both sub-categories (log Likelihood =20.03, p<0.0001 for

general content, log Likelihood =15.50, p<0.001 for specific content). This partiality for content criticisms in blog comments reflects the overall level of criticism in the genre.

Disagreement, and even conflict, seems to be a common feature of online communication, as we noted above. Anonymity, personal involvement, immediacy and informal norms of interaction contribute to a context which enables responders to vent their negative feelings to large audiences "to which they normally have no access outside the virtual world" (Kleinke, 2008, p. 419). In academic blogs, commenters also provide information about themselves only rarely. They generally fail to disclose their names and instead create an identity through their responses which are often separate from their everyday selves (Dennen, 2009). In our corpus, nearly 70% of blog responses are only tangentially related to the original blog post, with the blogger's topic merely acting as a trigger which inflames responders to ride a personal hobbyhorse. So, through comments, blog readers can share their views on any point that occurs to them with a potentially mass audience, and such diatribes seemed to be almost twice as common in the blog responses than on the book reviews.

The greater opportunities for an anonymous and heterogeneous community of readers to react to blogs also encourages more criticism of their content. The absence of a unifying disciplinary coherence means readers bring different interests and ideological positions to the text, encouraging uptake on any number of points. Add the anonymity afforded by the medium, which helps disguise status and power differences and often enables writers to violate everyday politeness norms, then commenters are able to indulge their critical faculties. Criticisms addressing specific aspects of the argument (1,2,3) are not only more frequent, but also tend to be much harsher than those referring to the overall text (4, 5, 6).

> (1) That's a straw man argument, so I reject it out of hand. (BC11) [2]
> (2) Sorry but the analysis here is dire! (BC2)
> (3) Far far more analysis and data need to be forthcoming. (BC9)
> (4) Perhaps the most notable is the lack of a strong theoretical lens through which to understand this particular campaign. (BR20)
> (5) The author of this article has completely failed to mention anything about the negative impacts high immigration rates have upon the lives of a very large cohort of people living in private rental housing. (BC9)

---

[2] BR refers to the book review corpus and BC to the blog comments corpus and the number identifies the text.

(6) The problem with this article is that it suffers from a key misconception itself.
(BC15)

In blogs, this kind of direct criticism appears to be a strategic use of conflict to promote a distinctive identity through a strong stance. The bluntness aggressively debunks either the whole text or specific arguments in it while simultaneously projecting the writer's allegiances to a particular sub-group or ideology.

Book reviewers similarly focused most of their criticism on specific content issues but tended to do so more gently, with 80.74% of all specific content critical acts mitigated in reviews compared with just 68.29% in blog comments. The propensity for criticism to correlate with more specific features is itself a form of mitigation, reserving criticism for aspects of the argument rather than condemning the entire book. The focus on specific content, moreover, contributes to the purpose of the genre as an

> …instrument for creating a psychological climate for examination, investigation, correction, modification, creation and invention of ideas and theoretical constructs regarding current theoretical problems, professional practice and policy statements. (Miranda, 1996: 197)

Book reviewers generally attempt to explore the detail of the ideas they encounter, criticising specifics and picking up individual points to raise questions and contribute to a knowledge-examining domain:

> (7) The weaker chapters, in contrast, start with the assumption that there is a rising tide of wrongful allegations that must be explained. The cause? (BR36)

> (8) Blau's statement is problematic, since it is not at all clear how such (mis) recognition might lead to cooperation and solidarity. (I say misrecognition because the values that accompany capitalism arguably do not comply with the values of global cooperation.) (BR23)

5.2 Criticisms of style

Evaluation of style addresses the clarity of the discussion, the organisation of the text, the conciseness of the arguments, the level of reading difficulty and editorial judgements. Our analysis also found it can include the choice of particular words as well as typing mistakes.

Blog commenters were significantly more critical about style issues than book reviewers (log Likelihood =6.95 p<0.03), and significantly less likely to mitigate them (log Likelihood =13.71 p<0.01).

It is, perhaps, slightly surprising that blog commenters should be concerned with style given the looser conventions of blog writing. Academic books are expected to be carefully written with consideration given to disciplinary conventions of form and organization to inform and persuade readers effectively (Hyland, 2002). Authors are engaged in a painstaking process of making their texts both readable and convincing, so stylistic lapses are often seized upon by reviewers:

> (9) Although the weight of the language occasionally disrupts the clarity of the arguments and ideas, I found these sections growing fewer in number as the book progressed. (BR5)

The academic blog, however, as a hybrid of an academic research register and popular journalism (e.g. Luzón, 2013), tends to be more tolerant of stylistic issues, perhaps because the norms of engagement are less clearly agreed and recognised. We find blogs mixing features of speech and writing, formal and informal discourses. Thus, where criticism was directed at stylistic infelicities, these were generally due to the responders' preferences (10, 11) or to explicit typos in the original (12):

> (10) Or you can cut something else. (BC1)
> (11) Please do not use emotive words like 'crash out'. Please instead refer to the actual activity which in this case is 'adopt World Trade rules'. (BC7)
> (12) "You asked": correction: "I was asked" (BC8)

5.3 Criticisms of readership

The criticism of readership refers to the writer's view of the value or relevance of the reviewed text for a particular target readership or community and these occurred roughly equally in both genres, although numbers are small. A published book has been referred to as a multilayered hybrid co-produced by the author and members of the audience to which it is directed (Knorr-Cetina 1981, p.106). As such, reviewers devoted some attention to whether the author has succeeded in reaching that audience. The aim here is to evaluate how the community might judge the book in terms of relevance, shared understandings and readability. Compared with the potential audience of blogs, readers of book reviews are

expected to have some disciplinary knowledge and familiarity with the conventions which shape their own judgements of the targeted book. This is linked to the fact that expressing evaluation in a book review text involves both a statement of personal judgement and an appeal to shared norms and values.

> (13) …one needs to have a good knowledge of qualitative methods to grasp fully the materials presented and discussed in the book. (BR14)

While frequencies are too small for conclusive statements, the slightly more uses of readership criticism in the blog comments may be related to the diverse target audience of the original post, where writers speak to multiple publics: experts and the interested laymen, serious researchers and lurkers. This apparently disjointed group transcends institutional boundaries and varies in its scientific knowledge, ideologies, assumptions, commitments, political views, and so on. To polarise blog audiences according to their subject knowledge, however, might be misleading as many members of the public are competent in specific areas. Thus, such criticisms target the readability of the work, rather than the readers, and how far the text provides access to ideas for a diverse body of readers. In fact, the strength of the collective views of a such a wide audience can, with the rapid mass transmission of opinion via social media, come to affect policy decisions. What unites blog readers, then, is perhaps a shared "expectations about the use of blogs as a tool for information, identity, and relationship management" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 1409).

5.4 Criticisms of presentation

Negative comments on presentation are, again, small. These address the extent, relevance and currency of references, the number, usefulness and quality of the figures and diagrams, the usefulness of the index and other aspects of presentation such as formatting, headings, etc.

We expected these to be mainly issues for published books, where authors present arguments supported by tables, figures, citations and so on to demonstrate the novelty of their claims and their relationship to past work. This architecture of persuasion is essential to the effectiveness of scholarly argument and so reviewers give some thought to them when evaluating a book. Blogs, on the other hand, are more streamlined arguments for an audience that does not require, or at least does not expect, a great deal of citational and diagrammatic support for claims. Surprisingly, however, there were not significantly fewer criticisms of presentation in blog comments (log Likelihood =3.72, p<0.13). Commenters often had

something to say about the blogger's choice of title, comprising half of all presentation criticisms. We might attribute this to the journalistic element of blogs where titles and sub-heads are a key means of attracting attention and gaining hits in a crowded online space:

(14) I really think the author of this article should demand the title be changed, which I've no doubt was chosen by an editor trying to shoehorn a silly clickbait simplification over the piece. (BC4)

(15) This article should be re-titled, "The Infantilization of US Culture." (BC11)

5.5 Criticisms of participants

The fact that blog responders can interact with other individuals in the comments section means that we expanded Hyland's (2004) book review framework to include other sub-categories of participants. As we have noted, this is a more polyphonic and multi-layered interactive context than the unidirectional book review, allowing posters to comment on other posts and establish a dialogue with other commenters as well as the original blogger. We also identified criticisms addressed to a sub-category we are calling *publics*, which includes any interested or relevant group cohering around the blog, and even to the poster him or herself. As we can see from Table 5, the total number of participant criticisms was significantly more in blog comments than book reviews (log Likelihood =14.56, p<0.001). More than our other findings, these results demonstrate the profound change in the participation framework of the blog genre, with the online affordances transforming the addressee mode from one to many. In blog comments, monologues become dialogues or polylogues (cf. Maroccia, 2004), and these are heavily characterised by disagreement.

Table 5 Frequencies of participant criticisms (per 1,000 words & %)

	Book reviews		**Blog comments**	
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%
Original author	0.00	0.00	0.03	3.70
Other commenters	0.00	0.00	0.18	33.3
Publics	0.08	66.7	0.26	37.0
Reviewer/Commenter himself/herself	0.03	33.3	0.13	26.0
Total	**0.11**	**100.00**	**0.60**	**100.00**

i. Criticisms of the original author and other commenters

Neither of these categories appeared in the book review corpus. Our analysis concurs with Hyland's (2004) study that book reviewers never criticise authors, although they occasionally praise them for their insights, reputation, qualifications or previous publications. Cases are also rare in blog comments (1 case of author criticism and 7 cases of other commenters), with no significant differences between the frequencies, and just a handful of examples, as here:

> (16) …. the author couldn't resist a cheap political attack. (BC11)

This general respect for the author, even in blogs, is perhaps a solidarity strategy as the reviewers/commenters seek to affirm an affinity with someone who has clearly taken considerable trouble and invested research time in producing a text. Even while critical of the content of the source text, which we have seen is common and can be quite direct, writers still weigh up the threat to the author's face and usually decide against a personal attack. This finding may be surprising when considering blogs as this is often a particularly hazardous environment for writers as they allow for direct and public criticism.

Other posters, however, came in for hostility on a number of occasions, with a third of all participant criticisms directed at them. Clearly this degree of engagement reflects the highly interactive and evaluative feature of the genre. While some journals allow readers to respond to book reviews in forum sections, readers cannot address each other with as little inconvenience and effort as in blogs. Opening a blog to comments is an invitation for readers to actively participate and it is usual to find, especially with a lively topic such as those we have selected for our study, several participants interacting with each other and with comments addressing one or several previous comments. Since these comments are often non-contiguous, the interplay of positions and issues often leads to complex turns that do not simply express disagreement with the previous turn, but may return to the post or other comments and combine the expression of a position with an assessment of the line of argument of any previous participant (Bondi, 2018b).

All this can get quite heated with criticism, often harshly expressed, directed against other commenters:

> (17) People like you disgust me. Trying to blame me for your friends' evil deeds!
>   (BC2)

(18) Are you really so idiotic as to believe that somebody can immigrate with the purpose of committing terrorist acts and not be noticed by the security services? (BC11)

Once again, the anonymity of the medium, a desire to construct a distinctive blog persona, and the highly emotive atmosphere that blogging appears to create, means that relatively high levels of conflict are often expressed.

ii Criticism of publics and self

Criticism of both publics (log Likelihood =5.17, p<0.07) and the poster/reviewer him or herself (log Likelihood =7.02, p<0.05) is significantly higher in blogs. The category 'publics' refers to non-contributing groups or communities which may have been referred to in the blog. Occasionally these publics are in the blog as background and foregrounded in a comment (19) or, more usually, specific groups referred to (20) or implied (21) in the blog or another post are singled out for criticism.

(19) Why is nobody shouting at the people below the bridge to get out of the f****ing way of the trolley? (BC5)

(20) How can these men… look at their own kids, say these words and do what they've done! (BC16)

(21) ….but then again, modern socialists refuse to learn this lesson, so perhaps they died for nothing after all. (BC4)

There are obviously varied and complex reasons for writers' decisions here, but such criticisms of publics can be used as a strategy, indicating that the problematic issues identified will likely be shared by other readers, serving to establish a persuasive inclusiveness as well as a reasonable commenter of events.

We also find more cases of self-criticism used by blog commenters compared with book reviewers. This can be an effective tool for managing one's presentation of self and for constructing a positive relationship with others in the discussion:

(22) If my head was not already so sore from banging against the wall, I would not be typing this. (BC16)

(23) Hi Gavin, my apologies for the way I framed my reply to your earlier comment. I appear to have in my hurry misread it and its intent. (BC7)

This kind of self-effacement minimizes, or redresses, the threat to others that the poster may have been criticising, but might also, of course, anticipate and minimise the possible attack or counter-argumentation from others.

6. Mitigation of criticism across genres

We were interested in the attention that writers gave to interpersonal factors in their criticisms by looking at mitigation. Mitigation acts are rhetorical devices such as hedges or indirectness which help soften the impact of a criticism. Overall, we found 188 mitigation devices in the book review corpus and 250 in the blog comments; this meant that 76.07% of all critical acts in book reviews were mitigated and 65.68% of those in the blog comments. To look at mitigation in more detail, we extracted all the words in critical acts as a sub-corpus and counted the acts of mitigation these contained. When normalized for text length, the total number amounted to 37.50 mitigation acts per 1,000 words in the book reviews compared with 34.77 in the blog comment corpus. The details are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Mitigation devices per 1,000 words of critical texts & % of total

	Book reviews		Blog comments		Significance test
	per 1,000 words	%	per 1,000 words	%	
Praise-criticism pair	8.58	22.87	1.53	4.40	p<0.0001
Hedges	14.96	39.89	9.60	27.60	p<0.019
Personal responsibility	5.39	14.36	12.10	34.80	p<0.0001
Other attribution	1.80	4.79	0.28	0.80	p<0.022
Illocutionary signalling	3.59	9.57	1.81	5.20	p<0.026
Indirectness	0.80	2.13	0.56	1.60	p<0.574
Critical questions	2.39	6.38	8.90	25.60	p<0.0001
Total	**37.50**	**100.0**	**34.77**	**100.0**	p<0.176

While the use of mitigation in the book reviews was slightly higher than in the blog comments, the difference was not significant (log Likelihood =3.08, p<0.176). However,

praise-criticism pairs, hedges, other attribution and illocutionary signalling were all significantly more frequent in book reviews while personal responsibility and critical questions were significantly more frequent in blog comments. Clearly, both reviewers and commenters are conscious of the possible effect of their criticisms and seek to soften the overall threat these might pose. Their preferred strategies are influenced by the function and impact of the features and the audiences of the two genres, as we discuss below.

6.1 Praise-criticism pairs and hedges

Both praise-criticism pairs (log Likelihood =35.17, $p<0.0001$) and hedges (log Likelihood = 7.81, $p<0.019$) were significantly more frequent in book reviews, accounting for nearly two thirds of all mitigation devices. These results are almost certainly related to the different writer-reader relations in the two genres. The book reviewers, as we have noted, can be more assured that they are talking to a fairly familiar audience; people who share many disciplinary understandings and interests and who have a common interest in the topics the book addresses or its author's work. They are therefore more likely to have a professional relationship with their readers and a shared commitment to, or at least awareness of, community expectations of interpersonal engagement (Hyland, 2004). Bloggers, on the other hand, are less certain of who their readers are and perhaps less motivated to maintain a positive relationship with them. In addition, in contrast to book reviews, the identity of the interactants in blogs can stay hidden, thus enabling them to reduce politeness and increase directness with impunity.

The juxtaposition of praise and criticism is a favoured strategy for book reviewers, then, as it inserts a positive evaluation into the mix, not only assuaging the critical force of a criticism but managing to highlight a positive feature of the text at the same time (24 and 25):

> (24) Nevertheless, despite the breadth of Barman's description and the originality of the work, the book is limited by the boundaries of its project. (BR10)
> (25) None the less, despite my total admiration for the book and the thorough-going empirical investigations on which it is based, I am uneasy with the authors' usage of the term 'sources of legitimacy'. (BR33)

Commenters use this strategy far less frequently, perhaps influenced by space constraints and regard for the less considered responses they might get as a result of immediate feedback. Opportunities are therefore restricted for this kind of discursively elaborate structure, and also

because the constrictions of disciplinary engagement are more relaxed. Thus, where such praise-criticism patterns occur, they tend to be blunter and more direct:

(26) Peter, you have interesting points, but they are mostly erroneous. (BC15)

(27) Looks like a good idea….at first glance. But now ask yourself why it is whatever useful thing is to be done… (BC18)

Hedges, on the other hand, are far more common in book reviews, comprising over a quarter of all mitigation devices in our corpus and 40% in the book reviews. Hedges are the scholarly mitigation device par excellence (Hyland, 1998) and mark appropriate caution, indicating that a statement is based on the writer's plausible reasoning rather than certainty. Hedges therefore display respect and cooperation with readers, signalling an awareness of potential opposition and attempting to head this off:

(28) Arguably, the book's subtitle is somewhat misleading. (BR4)

(29) However, those seeking a more fully elaborated definition of the 'caring capitalism' concept may be disappointed…(BR10)

The mitigation of critical evaluations in book reviews is presented through public statements and a representation of the writer as a competent and knowledgeable judge of contributions to disciplinary knowledge. The use of hedges reinforces both these claims by appealing to shared communicative norms through the choice of appropriate rhetorical devices from a disciplinary repertoire. Simultaneously it displays adherence to the values of disciplinary discourse.

In contrast, in blogs, participants are linked only loosely, comprising a group of previously unaffiliated individuals which has come together online through a more-or-less serious interest in the blog topic. They are often seen as highly verbal people who write with great irony and wit in their comments (Dennen, 2009) and as a result the commenter's attitude towards the blog post, and indirectly its blogger, is less likely to be influenced by the need to maintain solidarity with them. Blog commenters can construe relations of confrontation and use unmitigated criticism to construct a strong online persona and champion one cause against another (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010). Thus, less emphasis was paid to the mitigation and modification of their utterances.

6.2 Personal responsibility

While academic discourse is not an entirely faceless and anonymous register, the assertion of personal responsibility for one's views is certainly a marked choice. Here writers choose to associate themselves with the power relations inherent in judging another's work rather than employing conventions which construct a more egalitarian identity (Hyland, 2004). Taking personal responsibility for one's opinions therefore stakes a claim for the view expressed, but at the same time it restricts that view to one held by the writer alone. This strategy accounted for the highest proportion (34.8%) of all mitigation devices in the blog comments and was significantly more common than in book reviews (log Likelihood =19.36, $p<0.0001$).

Personal attribution is also a preferred strategy in blog comments as the genre borrows from more personal and dialogic forms of interaction, creating a sense of intimacy and proximity. The commenter seeks attention for his or her views in a context which appears to reward a high degree of self-presentation and impression formation (Davies & Merchant, 2007). This perception of the blog as a medium for self-expression, together with the more general readership, means writers tend to take personal responsibility for their opinions both to claim ownership of the view and to add a reflective dimension to the commenting process. This allows the commenters to speak directly to the reader in an unmediated way and helps signal an affiliation with the respondent:

> (30) I think you are still wrong. The same trends were still evident well before
>   New Labour. (BC3)
> (31) I am concerned that there is a lack of evidence of causality presented here.
>   (BC2)

The use of personal responsibility is also more common in the blogs as it shifts a traditional academic reliance on reasoned argument and research proof to assertions based largely on personal experience. There is a strong element of reader-orientation in this strategy as the writer seeks to address relevant 'acceptability conditions' (Hyland, 1998) by adopting a rhetorical stance which attends to the affective expectations of readers. Book reviews, however, are more solidly anchored in the conventions of impersonal academic argument and here personal responsibility was often combined with devices such as hedges and praise-criticism pairs to soften an authorial voice. In (32), for example, we find hedges working in concert with a praise-criticism pair, personal attribution and illocutionary signalling to weaken the force of the final criticism:

(32) While Professor Fish's book provides wonderful insights into the struggles
     and successes of the domestic workers' movement, I do have some concerns
     about the book. Perhaps the most notable is the lack of a strong theoretical lens
     through which to understand this particular campaign. (BR20)

6.3 Other attribution

Perhaps somewhat incongruently, writers did not only mitigate by implying a criticism was their own restrictive view, but also by attributing those views to others, thus "diffusing the criticism through shifting its source elsewhere" (Hyland, 2004, p.58). Other attribution was significantly more frequent in academic book reviews than blog comments (log Likelihood =7.62, p<0.022) where the conventions of referring to other research to support claims is an essential element of persuasive discourse. Book reviews not only seek to make evaluations public, but also persuasive, and they do this by drawing on disciplinary understandings and what other readers are likely to accept. Attributing views to others therefore displays a writer's allegiance to a particular community or position, and helps establish the credibility of the criticism while diffusing it in the understandings of the field. It constructs an appropriate context of persuasion by softening critical judgements in the brickwork of past claims:

(33) Some readers may quibble with Steele's categories, however: Does she ever
     really nail down the meanings of the cosmopolitan journalisms of her title?
     (BR25)

(34) The excerpts from the field diaries are frank, and their appraisal is something
     academic scholars might not expect. (BR35)

In addition, the uses of other attribution can help evoke a sense of shared understandings and rapport with members of a more familiar audience than that addressed by the blog commenter. The blog occupies a space between the public and the private spheres, and the commenter seeks validation through self-presentation. The commenter needs to be at the centre of the argument to create a strong and convincing voice and this leads them to criticise from a more personal standpoint, taking responsibility for their criticisms rather than allowing others to take the credit. Moreover, other attribution could potentially undermine the relative intimacy of the writer-reader relationship which commenters seek to create with their readers. Frequent reference to other researchers turns this negotiating space into something very different: the blog's open form and the possibility of using a relaxed style in postings allows writers to address a wider public in a way that most other scholarly communication

does not (Kjellberg, 2010). While we cannot know for sure from our findings, all these reasons may contribute to the fact that other attribution accounts for the lowest proportion of all mitigated devices in blog comments.

6.4 Illocutionary signalling

This category borrows from Speech Act theory to refer to those aspects of the text which alert the reader to a criticism by explicitly labelling a part of the text as a critical act. It has the effect of shifting attention from the ideas being discussed to focus on the act of discussing itself. This device was significantly more frequent in book reviews (log Likelihood =7.29, $p<0.026$), probably as a consequence of the more reader-considerate nature of the genre and close interpersonal relations among members of the same community.

Solidarity tends to be highly valued in traditional academic genres and so a recognition that book authors and readers deserve some consideration is an important consideration for book reviewers. Although reviewers are encouraged to explore the weakness of the reviewed book and thus to contribute to testing the ideas which are being presented to the community, they still need to strike a balance between conveying negative judgments and maintaining harmonious relationships. As a result, labelling critical acts in this way prepares readers for the following disparagement, drawing readers' attention to the intentions of the reviewer and refocusing them on the act of evaluating, rather than the evaluation itself. In this sense, it makes the evaluation less face-threatening and communication smoother so as to avoid a more hostile depiction of the reviewed book:

 (35) There are a few missteps in the book. (BR1)

 (36) I do have some concerns about the book. (BR20)

The online, anonymous polylogue contexts of blogs, on the other hand, encourage greater directness and illocutionary labelling was rare. When they did occur, they were always expressed with more assertive force than those in book reviews:

 (37) I can't help wondering…(BC7)

 (38) So, let me get this straight. (BC5)

6.5 Indirectness

Indirectness refers to the practice of offering limited praise or positive comments on irrelevant aspects as a means of conveying criticism. It weakens the negative force of the

criticism by saying less than the writer means and leaves the reader to make appropriate connections (Hyland, 2004). The criticism is carried by the fact that the utterance provides less (or less vital) information than might reasonably be anticipated. While it cannot always be reliably identified by analysts, we found only a handful of cases and that they were slightly, but not significantly, more frequent in book reviews.

The preference of book reviewers for these devices is a result of the fact indirectness is, by definition, oblique and draws to some extent on specific community knowledge. The writer is not relying on rhetorical or world knowledge to convey criticism, but evaluative ambiguities, hoping the reader shares sufficient understandings to their meaning. This then, is criticism mitigated by collusive camaraderie (e.g. Hyland, 2004). It is a strategy diffused with solidarity and so is more effective where there is greater common understandings among participants.

    (39) Ultimately, readers must make up their own minds. (BR28)

    (40) This book….will be of interest to electoral lawmakers. (BR17)

Such subtleties, particularly in (40) which perhaps hints that the book will interest nobody else) may be lost in the more direct cut-and-thrust of blog evaluations where relations with an audience are established on the basis of shared purposes and interests, rather than assumed specialized subject knowledge.

6.6 Critical questions

The last mitigation device we identified was the use of critical questions, or questions used to express critical judgements rather than elicit information. In most cases, they immediately followed a critical statement, softening the critique by apparently asking the writer and his or her audience to reflect on an issue the commenter is challenging.

Questions are under-represented in academic writing, being some 50 times more common in conversation, and this is largely because of the sense of rapport and intimacy they help construct (Hyland, 2002). The ways writers use questions are closely related to their assessments of appropriate reader relationships and, for this reason, they are significantly more common (log Likelihood =24.70, $p<0.0001$) in blog comments where they comprised a quarter of all mitigation strategies. This more egalitarian, personal context provides an environment in which questions seem natural, allowing the commenter to immediately

present his or her critical, but mitigated, viewpoint. Critical questions allow commenters to move away from a monologue and turn a one-sided exposition into a dialogue, recruiting readers into a virtual debate. It thus helps to manufacture immediacy and informality and encourage the interested public to contribute to the collective construction of the argument:

> (41) Should we really talk about understanding Leavers and sympathise with the pain of austerity and crisis? Should we accept that marginalisation and economic plight leads to racism and xenophobia? No, I do not think so. (BC15)
>
> (42) How did they achieve that and has everyone benefited? (BC15)

Commenters thus seek to explicitly establish the presence of their readers in the text: inviting engagement and bringing them into an arena where they can be led to the writer's viewpoint. The writers of book reviews, closely following more traditional conventions of academic argument, treat critical questions with greater suspicion. Here questions not only serve to highlight an imbalance of knowledge between participants but are seen as a crude persuasive strategy.

7. Conclusion

In bringing the two genres discussed here together under the label of 'review genres' we are making some assumptions of similarity. We see these texts as cohering around a core purpose of evaluation as both genres set out to assess the ideas presented in another, public, text; they both comment on the contributions of academics and they both do this using established media which are publicly accessible. Clearly, however, they do this in different ways and our analysis has sought to highlight these differences, showing how the constraints and affordances of each contributes to very different evaluative contexts. Most importantly, we show that while blog commenters focus on similar aspects of the source text, they were more critical of everything in it, and that they often turn to criticise other commenters, the text author and general public. We also found that blog commenters mitigated these criticisms less than book reviewers and that they tended to use more personal devices to do so.

These differences may not be entirely surprising; after all, the blog responder writes in a different world to the book reviewer. He or she is less constrained by many of the formal trappings of academic rhetorical conventions and enabled by a more interactive environment where participants are often anonymous, audiences more heterogeneous, and responses

potentially instantaneous. This is also in line with previous studies which indicate the comments are woven into multi-party polylogues (Bondi, 2018a; Luzón, 2012b). The norms of evaluative engagement familiar to academics from book reviews, review articles, book blurbs and literature reviews are transformed in an online environment which is generally more tolerant of hostility, conflict and blunt criticism. Unlike some web-mediated genres such as online newspapers and newsgroups, however, commenters observe standards of interactional decorum which are closer to academic review practices. While The Conversation UK academic blog website does not specify contributors to use academic conventions, it requests them to post comments which are fact-based and directed at ideas instead of people to avoid personal attacks. Politeness strategies, therefore, still suffuse criticism and this finding shows that it is not only book reviewers who are conscious of the need to signal face-respect through mitigation.

This is, of course, a relatively small study of one field, and further work might explore how far our findings are generalizable to fields like, say, geology or historical linguistics which might generate less heat than social and political issues. We also need to know how other features differ across the two genres. Other work may wish to challenge our assumption that academic blog comments are a review genre or are even a single genre at all. However, all this is interesting because it tells us how individuals make use of this context: what they actually do to participate in an environment that is neither completely journalistic, conversational or academic. It shows us something of how writers respond to new rhetorical exigencies and how academic criticism is constructed, what it is directed at and how it is softened. To do this, blog commenters create novel critical categories, use criticism to signal their allegiances to particular ideas or groups, and use a wider range of mitigation which reflects the more personal, interactive and inclusive nature of blogs. The study also suggests that academic blog comments need to be taken seriously as an academic review genre, with audience characteristics, context, and emergent generic features influencing the role that criticism plays and the forms it takes.

References

Angouri, J., & Tseliga, T. (2010). "You Have No Idea What You are Talking About!" From e-disagreement to e-impoliteness in two online fora. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 6(1), 57-82.

Anthony, L. (2018). *AntConc (Version 3.5.7) [Computer Software]*. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Retrieved from: http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html

Bolander, B. (2012). Disagreements and agreements in personal/dairy blogs: a close look at responsiveness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 44(12), 1607-1622.

Bondi, M. (2018a). Try to prove me wrong: dialogicity and audience involvement in economics blogs. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 24, 33-42.

Bondi, M. (2018b). Blogs as interwoven polylogues: The dialogic action game. *Language and Dialogue*, 8(1), 43-65.

Davies, J., & Merchant, G. H. (2007). Looking from the inside out: academic blogging as new literacy. In C. Lankshear & M. Knobel (Eds.), *A new literacies sampler* (pp. 167-197). New York: Peter Lang.

Dennen, V. P. (2009). Constructing academic alter-egos: identity issues in a blog-based community. *Identity in the information society*, 2(1), 23-38.

Diani, G. (2015). Politeness. In K. Aijmer & C. Rühlemann (Eds.), *Corpus Pragmatics: A Handbook* (pp. 169-191). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Efimova, L., & de Moor, A. (2005). Beyond personal webpublishing: an exploratory study of conversational blogging practices. In: *Proceedings of the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (HICSS-38), IEEE Computer Society Press, 3-6 January. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Press.

Giannoni, D. S. (2006). Expressing Praise and Criticism in Economic Discourse: A Comparative Analysis of English/Italian Book Reviews. In G. Del Lungo Camiciotti, M. Dossena & B. Crawford Camiciottoli (Eds.), *Variation in Business and Economics Discourse: Diachronic and Genre Perspectives* (pp. 126-138). Rome: Officina Edizioni.

Hyland, K. (1998). *Hedging in scientific research articles*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.

Hyland, K. (2002). Directives: Argument and engagement in academic writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(2), 215-239.

Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Hyland, K. (2006). Medical discourse: Hedges. In K. Brown (Eds.)., *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics (2nd edition)* (pp. 694-697). Oxford: Elsevier.

Hyland, K. (2019). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. London: Bloomsbury.

Hyland, K., & Diani, G. (2009). Introduction: Academic evaluation and review genres. In K. Hyland & G. Diani (Eds.), *Academic evaluation: Review genres in university settings* (pp. 1-16). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Itakura, H., & Tsui, A. B. M. (2011). Evaluation in academic discourse: Managing criticism in Japanese and English book reviews. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43, 1366-1379.

Kjellberg, S. (2010). I am a blogging researcher: Motivations for blogging in a scholarly context. *First Monday*, 15(8), Retrieved from http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2962/2580

Kleinke, S. (2008). Emotional commitment in public political internet message boards. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 27(4), 409-421.

Knorr-Cetina, K. (1981). *The Manufacture of Knowledge*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Landis, J.R., & Koch, G.G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*, 33, 159-174.

Lindholm-Romantschuk, Y. (1998). *Scholarly book reviewing in the social sciences and humanities*. London: Greenwood Press.

Luzón, M. J. (2011). "Interesting post, but I disagree": Social presence and antisocial behavior in academic weblogs. *Applied Linguistics*, 32(5), 517-540.

Luzón, M. J. (2012a). Comments in Academic Blogs as a New Form of Scholarly Interaction. In C. Berkencotter, V. Bhatia & M. Gotti. (Eds.), Insights into Academic Genres (pp. 281-300). Bern, Peter Lang.

Luzón, M. J. (2012b). "Your argument is wrong": a contribution to the study of evaluation in academic weblogs. *Text & Talk*, 32 (2), 145-165.

Luzón, M. J. (2013). "This is an erroneous argument": Conflict in academic blog discussions. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 2(2), 111-119.

Maroccia, M. (2004). On-line polylogues: conversation structure and participation framework in internet newsgroups. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36, 115-145.

Mauranen, A. (2013). Hybridism, edutainment, and doubt: Science blogging finding its feet. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 13(1), 7-36.

Miranda, E.O. (1996). On book reviewing. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 30(2), 191-202.

Myers, G. (1989). The Pragmatics of Politeness in Scientific Articles. *Applied Linguistics*, 10 (1), 1-35.

Neurauter, M. (2011). Im/polite reader responses on British online news sites. *Journal of Politeness Research. Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 7(2), 187-214.

Puschmann, C. (2013). Blogging. In S. Herring, D. Stein & T. Virtanen (Eds.), *Pragmatics of Computer-Mediated Communication* (pp. 83-108). Berlin: DeGruyter.

Salager-Meyer, F., Alcaraz Ariza, M. A. & Pabón Berbesí, M. (2007). Collegiality, critique and the construction of scientific argumentation in medical book reviews: A diachronic approach. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, 1758-1774.

Schmidt, J. (2007). Blogging Practices: An Analytical Framework. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 1409-1427.

Shaw, P. (2009). The Lexis and Grammar of Explicit Evaluation in Academic Book Reviews, 1913 and 1993. In K. Hyland & G. Diani (Eds.), *Academic evaluation: Review genres in university settings* (pp. 217-235). UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, J. (2006). Blogging from inside the Ivory Tower. In A. Bruns & J. Jacobs (Eds.), *Uses of blogs* (pp. 127-138). New York: Peter Lang.

Yus, F. (2015). Interactions with Readers through Online Specialized Genres: Specificity or Adaptability?. In L. Gil-Salmon & C. Soler-Monreal (Eds.), *Dialogicity in Written Specialised Genres* (pp. 189-208). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Appendix: Source of journals for the book reviews

Journal of Sociology

British Journal of Sociology

Party Politics

Social Forces

The International Journal of Press/Politics

British journal of criminology