"Don't buy this book!"

Critical Book Reviews in German

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Although nobody would deny that academic criticism is an inherent feature of academic communication, most of the existing studies assume that due to the nature of the development of science, collaborative rhetoric is intrinsic to academic discourse and criticism is the exception rather than the rule. The issue has been approached from disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural as well as historical perspectives, but practically all investigations have been based on socio-pragmatic theories and discuss the problems from the point of view of Speech Act and Politeness Strategies Theories. Thus, linguists have tried to find out what kind of linguistic means are used in order to exercise or avoid criticism – vague language, hedging, boosting, among others. Sociologists, on the other hand, have seen academic criticism mainly as an expression of the ever-increasing competitiveness for professional recognition in the modern world.

Scientific book reviews, on their part, not only belong to the basic academic genres, but also possess a functionally determined highly evaluative character, thus being potential carriers of academic criticism. They have, unfortunately, received relatively little attention as yet. German linguists have sporadically dealt with the problem over the past 20 years, paying attention to the description of the review article as a text type (*Textsorte)* (Pätzold 1982, Gläser 1990), the reasons for writing reviews from a socio-cultural perspective and the expression of evaluation (Wiegand 1983), the text structure and the linguistic realisation of criticism with special focus on hedging devices (Wills 1997, Hutz 2001).

The present pilot study is based on a sample corpus of 10 book reviews in German applied linguistics which have a definitely negative character. It aims at uncovering the argumentation strategies used by review writers in terms of the classical Aristotelian theory, where 'argumentation' is understood as „mehr oder weniger komplexe Sprachhandlungen, mit Hilfe derer die Zuhörer oder Gesprächspartner überzeugt werden sollen" (Ottmers 1996:65).

Within this theory the notion of *topic* plays a crucial role: "*Common topoi* are general principles or rules of human inference which serve to guarantee the transition from the

premises to the conclusion" (McElholm 2002:77). There are two basic types of topoi: those based on *everyday-logic generic premises* and those with *conventionalised conclusions,* where each of these groups contains the following subgroups:

I. Topoi based on everyday-logic generic premises:
1. Topoi from the consequence
    - cause and effect
    - reason and consequence
    - means and goal
2. Topoi from the comparison
    - identity or similarity
    - difference or low degree of similarity
    - 'more or less'
3. Topoi from the contrast
    - absolute contrast
    - relative contrast
    - alternative contrast
    - semantically incompatible opposites
4. Topoi from the division (classification)
    - part and whole
    - species and genus
    - definition
5. Topoi from the example
II. Topoi with conventionalised conclusions
    1. Topos from the authority
    2. Topos from the analogy
    3. Topos from the person.

The topoi enumerated above will serve as analytical methodological instruments for the investigation of argumentation in book reviews. The analysis leads to some conclusions concerning the argumentation strategies used by writers and their realisation, the degree to which criticism is based on logic (objective) and on personal evaluation (subjective), the preference for and / or avoidance of certain topoi, among others.

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