



Towards A Taxonomical Structure of Book Reviews in Applied Linguistics: A Move Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Practice in writing book reviews (BRs) is considered beneficial for graduate students as it helps them develop academic argumentation skills prior to writing their dissertations. Taxonomical differences in BRs exist across disciplines, particularly in their generic and rhetorical structures. As part of a material development initiative in Applied Linguistics, this paper analyses BRs published in the *RELC Journal* between 2015 and 2020 to establish their taxonomical structures. A total of 32 book reviews were examined, and both their generic and rhetorical structures were analysed using Swales's (1990) move analysis approach and the framework proposed by Gezejin (2015). The communicative functions of each move were also identified to enhance students' genre awareness. The analysis revealed four dominant generic structures and their associated rhetorical moves: introducing the book (General topic[^], Author(s)[^], Readership[^], Book insertion[^]), outlining the book (Organisation[^], Topics[^], Extra text material[^]), highlighting parts of the book (Focused evaluation[^]), and providing a closing evaluation (Recommendation[^]). Furthermore, the analysis identified four distinct compositional approaches employed by BR writers, generating novel insights and offering pedagogical benefits for second-language writing instruction.

Keywords: Book reviews, book review genre, genre analysis, taxonomical structure, move analysis

Introduction

Academic writing in English, as a target language, is a compulsory academic skill across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in many disciplines. Second language (L2) learners are expected to develop academic writing competencies that meet disciplinary standards and uphold academic integrity (Hyland, 2009). In this regard, L2 academic writing encompasses more than the act of writing itself; it also entails the ability to read, comprehend, analyse, and synthesise texts in the target language (Paltridge, 2014). When L2 learners have limited exposure to the language and insufficient instructional scaffolding, they may experience academic difficulties (Phakiti & Li, 2011), which can impede the development of an academic voice and hinder their engagement with the academic writing community of practice (Bhatia, 2004; Paltridge, 2014). These challenges become particularly salient when students are required to develop academic arguments in the process of writing a thesis or dissertation as a degree requirement. According to international statistical reports, Thailand is identified as an underrepresented country in academic publishing within Scopus and ISI databases (Scopus, 2021). This highlights the continued need to prepare EFL learners for participation in the academic writing community and to provide them with robust instructional support to foster success in academic writing.

Writing a book review is widely regarded as an effective means of preparing undergraduate and postgraduate students in Applied Linguistics to develop academic arguments in writing. Book reviews (BRs) published in academic journals require writers to engage deeply with disciplinary texts, understand ongoing debates, and summarise the central contributions of the book (Lewis, 2020). These skills are essential for language students as they build their academic communicative competence prior to composing research-based articles or dissertations in their final year of study. Leading scholars in Applied Linguistics emphasise the importance of writing BRs at an early stage of entering the academic community, as this practice familiarises novice writers with disciplinary writing conventions, phraseological patterns, academic discourse, and genre norms characteristic of the field (e.g., Yeo et al., 2022).

Despite its importance, the BR genre has received comparatively limited scholarly attention (e.g., Gezegin, 2015; Lewis, 2020), particularly regarding its taxonomic structure, which is crucial for supporting students'

and novice writers' academic development. Highlighting the scarcity of taxonomical analyses of BRs, Lewis (2020) notes that “although editorial guidelines are usually provided for writers of articles, suggestions to book reviewers on how to write are harder to find” (p. 253). This underscores the need for more genre-based investigations of BRs to clarify the step-by-step rhetorical moves involved in BR composition and to identify the strategies writers employ to construct academic arguments within this genre.

The present study aims to analyse book reviews in the field of Applied Linguistics to establish a taxonomy of schematic structures – generic and rhetorical – along with their communicative functions, as commonly found in book reviews published in the *RELC Journal* between 2015 and 2020. The findings are expected to provide clearer insights into the taxonomical structure of book reviews typically produced in this field, and the resulting BR taxonomy may serve as a scaffold to support language teachers and practitioners in preparing tertiary students for academic writing. In line with these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the generic and rhetorical structures, and their communicative functions found in the BRs?
2. What are the approaches predominantly practised by the BR writers?

Literature Review

Genre and Genre Analysis

The notion of genre, first articulated by Martin (1984), is rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as proposed by Halliday (1994). The theoretical foundation of SFL that informs the concept of genre concerns textual meanings, linguistic choices, and the relationship between texts and their contexts. Furthermore, language use is shaped by the broader social and cultural environments in which it is produced (e.g., Butt et al., 2012; Eggins, 2004; Martin, 2009; Martin & Rose, 2008). Within this framework, genre refers to the staged, goal-oriented processes through which meaning is constructed in interaction with others (Martin & Rose, 2008; Rose & Martin, 2012). These stages of language use constitute conventionalised communicative practices that enable writers to express specific goals aligned with disciplinary or institutional contexts, thereby giving rise to relatively stable structural patterns that constrain the deployment of “lexicogrammatical and discoursal resources” (Bhatia, 2004, p. 23). Genres are typically classified into two types: macro-genres and micro-genres. Macro-genres encompass longer texts such as novels and biographies (Martin & Rose, 2008), whereas micro-genres refer to shorter texts, including reports

(Martin, 1997). Given that genre-based writing is inherently goal-oriented, both the content and form of writing serve the communicative purposes of each genre. Different genres, therefore, require specific schematic structures to convey intended meanings effectively to members of the relevant disciplinary community (e.g., Butt et al., 2012; Damrongmanee & Rojanaatichartasakul, 2023; Rose & Martin, 2012; Watanabe, 2017).

Genre analysis is a theoretical approach to the study of genres. Rose (2012) explains that genre analysis investigates how discourse and linguistic features relate to the functional purposes of language use within the contexts that shape and are shaped by such discourse. Because genre is socially constructed and inherently goal-oriented, multiple genres emerge as normative ways of producing language within particular communities. Analysing written texts, as undertaken in this study, requires categorising them into appropriate genres based on key features that can serve as practical guidelines for early-career researchers entering academia. One of the most crucial determinants is the communicative purpose of a text, which helps identify the genre to which a specific text belongs and provides a basis for establishing its schematic structure. Within these schematic structures are subcomponents, known as schematic stages, that represent the steps writers must take to express their ideas effectively (Eggins, 2004; Martin, 1992). Martin further notes that micro-genres can be used to analyse a text's rhetorical purposes. In line with this conceptualisation, the present study applies genre analysis to examine the macro-genre of selected book reviews. This approach contributes to a clearer understanding of how academic writing, specifically book reviews, is structured. It also addresses the noted scarcity of research on book reviews (Lewis, 2020).

Book Reviews in Applied Linguistics

Despite growing scholarly interest in investigating review structures, book reviews continue to be associated with the broader notion of the “academic review genre” (Hyland, 2009, p. 1). A book review is typically understood as a written text that describes and evaluates a book within a particular discipline. Compared with texts from other academic genres, book reviews are relatively brief. The primary purpose of this genre is to evaluate a scholarly work, providing details about its structure, content, and target readership (Hyland, 2000). Expanding on this definition, Gea-Valor (2000) characterises book reviews as “a discourse type which basically involves description, information and evaluation” (p. 12). Likewise, De Carvalho (2001) asserts that the genre is defined by its dual descriptive and evaluative functions (p. 262).

Book reviews also play an important role in language instruction. A foundational understanding of how a book review is constructed can help both students and teachers in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses better comprehend the functions of academic genres (Motta-Roth, 1995). Writing book reviews is particularly beneficial for novice writers and early career researchers, as it enables them to develop an academic voice by engaging critically with texts in their area of expertise and potentially publishing their reviews in international peer-reviewed journals (Haas, 1994; Motta-Roth, 1995). Furthermore, publishing book reviews can support the academic development of postgraduate students and emerging scholars who are beginning to navigate the publication process; the skills cultivated through writing reviews may later inform their professional growth, including their ability to serve as peer reviewers for academic journals (Hyland, 2000; Motta-Roth, 2001).

Previous Studies on Book Reviews

Previous studies on the book review genre have addressed various aspects of genre analysis. Many studies have sought to identify rhetorical structures (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2005; Hartley, 2006; Moreno & Suárez, 2008), disciplinary variations (e.g., Diani, 2009; Tse & Hyland, 2009), meaning-related features (e.g., Giannoni, 2002; Hyland & Diani, 2009), and cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary differences (e.g., Bondi, 2009; Gezezin, 2015). A seminal study by Motta-Roth (1995) investigated the rhetorical patterns of book reviews across disciplines, including Linguistics, Economics, and Chemistry, and is regarded as an early attempt to establish a genre framework for book reviews. Using a move analysis approach derived from Swales (1990) and grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study identified four moves and eleven sub-functions in book reviews, as summarised in Table 1. A more recent study by Gezezin (2015), also employing move analysis, examined a corpus of 385 book reviews published in Turkish and English academic journals across ten disciplines between 1990 and 2015. This analysis resulted in the identification of a new move, “stating the purpose of the review”, to be added to Motta-Roth’s (1995) model; however, no associated sub-functions were observed (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Rhetorical Patterns in Book Reviews from Gezezin’s (2015) and Motta-Roth’s (1995) Studies

Move 1: Stating the purpose of the review (Gezegin, 2015)

Move 2: Introducing the book (Motta-Roth, 1995)

Sub-function 1: Defining the general topic of the book

Sub-function 2: Informing about potential readership

Sub-function 3: Informing about the author

Sub-function 4: Making topic generalisation

Sub-function 5: Inserting a book in the field

Move 3: Outlining the book

Sub-function 6: providing a general view of book organisation

Sub-function 7: Stating the topic of each chapter

Sub-function 8: Citing extra text material

Move 4: Highlighting parts of the book

Sub-function 9: Providing focused evaluation

Move 5: Providing closing evaluation of the book

Sub-function 10: Definitely recommending/
disqualifying the book

Sub-function 11: Recommending the book
despite indicated shortcomings

Notably, the model of rhetorical patterns derived from Gezegin's (2015) and Motta-Roth's (1995) analyses of book reviews across academic disciplines was adopted as the theoretical framework for the present study. However, this study employs two terms, generic and rhetorical structures, in line with the SFL framework. Specifically, generic structures refer to the patterns used by writers to create a recognisable textual framework; these structures align with the definition of genres because genres are shaped by social criteria, such as social purpose, audience, and actions, rather than solely by lexicogrammatical elements (Lee, 2001). Rhetorical structures, in contrast, represent the flow of a text or the way it develops in accordance with rhetorical functions, which correspond to the communicative purposes of the text (Wang & Tsai, 2007). As Swales (1990) notes, the communicative function is a critical consideration in genre analysis, as it determines the text's categorisation within a particular genre. Accordingly, a text is constructed differently depending on its communicative purpose. In the case of book reviews, the primary communicative function is to inform readers within various academic disciplines about the theoretical and substantive contributions of a book. Furthermore, writing a book review also contributes to professional development, enabling academics to articulate theoretical insights and experience-based reflections on the content and significance of the book.

Methodology

Source Texts

This study analysed book reviews published in the RELC Journal between 2015 and 2020. As part of a material development project based on a manageable dataset, only book reviews from this leading journal in Applied Linguistics during the six-year period were included. Despite the limited dataset, the study is exploratory, allowing for an in-depth investigation, particularly of the approaches writers use to compose their book reviews. The overall dataset comprised 32 book reviews. Notably, some issues did not include any book reviews, whereas others published three to four reviews. All included book reviews were written in English, as required by the journal, and underwent a peer-review process prior to publication. Regarding journal information, the RELC Journal publishes three issues per year and is managed by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Regional Language Centre (RELC), Singapore. The journal is indexed in the Scopus and ISI databases and is considered a leading publication in Applied Linguistics and language learning. Selecting the BRs from the reputable journal could generate a reflective impact to the field as the BRs have gone through a rigorous reviewing process (Duman et al. 2015).

Data Analysis

The analytical framework was based on existing research on rhetorical patterns in book reviews across academic disciplines, including Applied Linguistics, as identified by Gezezin (2015) and Motta-Roth (1995), and is summarised in Table 1. The data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the researcher and an invited ELT scholar, both with expertise in move analysis, independently examined the dataset. Subsequently, the two analysts collaboratively reviewed the data in a final round of analysis to ensure consistency and strengthen the reliability of the findings (Holliday, 2015). Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, resulting in an overall inter-analyst agreement of 90%.

Findings and Discussions

RQ1: What are the generic and rhetorical structures, and their communicative functions found in the BRs?

The generic structures of the included book reviews initially began with (1) introducing the book, (2) outlining the book, (3) highlighting parts of the book, and (4) providing the writer's closing evaluation of the book, as illustrated in Table 2. Excerpt 1 illustrates how the writer introduced the book, *Mobile Learning*, providing general information about the book and its relation to today's language teaching and learning. The rhetorical moves can be structured as a general topic ^ as evident in sentence 1, author ^ given

through the definition from the book (as in sentence 2), readership[^], as portrayed in the last sentence, and book insertion[^], also seen in the last sentence. Each structure was also constructed to serve different communicative purposes of a book review as illustrated in Table 1.

Excerpt 1

Mobile Learning, part of the 'Into the Classroom' series of practical guides for language teachers, is a timely and practitioner-friendly resource for teachers to engage today's generation of learners. Mobile devices are one of the most widely used information and communication technologies available (Mahdi, 2017), and numerous studies have investigated the benefits of mobile learning (Alrasheedi and Capretz, 2015; Sung et al., 2016). Accordingly, it is only natural that we, as educators, take advantage of this medium to actively involve and stimulate students in the learning process.

(Kohnke, 2015, p. 497)

Concerning another salient move, the analyses illustrated that all BR authors practiced the move of *outlining of the book*. As provided in Excerpt 2, the author began the BR by explicitly stating the organisation of the book as seen in sentence 1, stating that "*the book begins with...*" (Graham, 2019, p. 501). Another explicit structure for outlining the book was for the writers to simply precede the BR, stating, "Part 1 shows..." or "Chapter 1 indicates". The analyses suggested that this structure was found in the 21 BRs (65.63%) as illustrated in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 2

The book begins with an introduction written by the editors that defines EMI, reviews the Chinese government EMI policy, and outlines the theoretical and practical issues. Of particular interest is the discussion of the difficulty of defining EMI in the Chinese context, given its various implementations. With EMI being defined by the Chinese government as more than 50 percent of instruction in English, 'EMI courses' may be more bilingual in nature. However, due to the lack of emphasis on language objectives, the editors settled on 'EMI' as the term 'bilingual education' may be a misnomer in Western conceptualisations. As a result of this discrepancy, it may be difficult to generalise the findings of this book to other EMI contexts.

(Graham, 2019, p. 501)

Excerpt 3

Chapter 1, 'Introduction to Research', introduces quantitative and qualitative research types, a typical quantitative research format, question identification and hypothesis generation, and the issue of feasibility and replication in SLA research. Chapter

2, 'Issues Related to Data Gathering', raises ethical issues in data collection in studies with human subjects.

(Akbarian, 2019, p.358)

The rhetorical structures of the BRs under the generic structure of outlining the book can be structured as organisation[^], topics[^], and extra text material[^]. Specifically, to outline what the book contains, the writer relied on how it was organised into chapters or parts. As illustrated in Excerpt 3, the author simply summarised the key concepts the book's author had included so that the reader could have a holistic picture of that chapter or part. For the extra text material, the author simply added information about the interesting part of the book (as given in Excerpt 4) in the last sentence.

Excerpt 4

The data, however collected, should be organized in a clear, manageable, and analysable format. Thus, Chapter 4, 'Coding', Chapter 8 in the first edition, explains processes on how to transcribe and prepare the raw data and how to adopt, adapt, or devise coding systems based on different types of data and research questions. It also gives advice on how to establish coding reliability for consistency purposes with regard to quantitative and qualitative data, and how and when to implement the coding. This second edition finally introduces a coding software for use when necessary.

(Akbarian, 2018, p.358)

To the generic structure of highlighting parts of the book[^], this structure was constructed to serve the BR writer's attention on creating their own evaluation. In this structure, the BR writer focuses on a specific point in the book and evaluates the information in relation to the book, its readership, and its contribution to the field. This also reflects the rhetorical structure of the BR, as deemed to be tailored for a specific, focused evaluation of the BR writers. Excerpt 5 illustrates a key example of such a structure.

Excerpt 5

This edited volume is a powerful, engaging, and inspiring collection of reflective accounts of TR in action. The authors have carefully laid out the context, rationale, and description of their TR-driven projects, and have produced convincing narratives which discuss the meta- behind TR. As a teacher-researcher, I felt that the strength of the book derives from the positioning and identities the authors have: they are all teacher-researchers. Thus, their stories are vivid examples of connections between theory and practice, bottom-up endeavours and realistic undertakings which we can use to develop our own teacher research initiatives in our local contexts. Throughout the chapters, readers can gain a sense of

commitment and engagement. The book provides a balanced view of possibilities, challenges and ways in which the latter can be addressed given certain contextual conditions.

(Banegas, 2016, p. 117)

The writer of the BR initially formed his/her impression of the book's merit in the field of teacher research. The writer further focused on the book's key concepts and evaluated them through the perspectives of a language teacher, practitioner, educator, and researcher, using "*As a teacher-researcher,..*". At the end of the paragraph, the BR writer also touched on the perceived benefits the target readers would receive from the book, as addressed in the last two sentences: "*Throughout the chapters, readers can gain a sense of commitment and engagement*" [Banegas, 2016, p. 117].

The final structure of the BR appears to be "providing closing evaluation." Most of the BR writers practiced this move in their BRs to deliver their final remarks on their recommendation of the book. This also reflects the rhetorical structure of the BR. Excerpt 6 illustrates that the writer explicitly used the phrase "*I highly recommend this e-book to any interested teachers and educators...*" to make his final recommendation. However, another way the BR writer practiced in leaving their recommendation was also indirect, as evident in Excerpt 7. This BR writer tried to raise awareness towards the benefits of the book in relation to the suitable targets without using the lexical item of "recommend." Instead, the BR writer highlights the merit of pedagogical practices suitable for both graduate and postgraduate studies, as evident in Excerpt 7.

Excerpt 6

It is worth noting that there are many levels of leadership to tackle the challenges in low-resource classrooms. Readers can search the 'Global Education Monitoring Reports' in the UNESCO website, (<http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/>) for further reading. The narratives of seasoned teachers in this e-book are tools for transformation. I highly recommend this e-book to any interested teachers and educators for their leisure reading as it provides inspiration for professional development.

(Fung, 2019, p.501)

Excerpt 7

Despite the few shortcomings which are inevitable in all works of such scope, the book has covered important practical topics in corpus linguistics making it an excellent choice of text not only for undergraduate and graduate courses but also for those who are looking for a practical and simply worded self-study resource.

(Shirazizadeh, 2019, p.363)

As summarised in Table 2, the analyses indicate that the generic and rhetorical structures of academic book reviews in Applied Linguistics are mainly consistent with those identified in Gezezin's (2015) and Motta-Roth's (1995) studies. The rhetorical structures commonly found in the reviews include general topic, author(s), readership, book insertion, organisation, topics, extra text material, focused evaluation, and recommendation. In line with the aim of the present study, communicative functions were established for each of these structures, offering potential pedagogical value for EFL lecturers who may later incorporate them into academic writing instruction. One structure not observed in the dataset was "introducing the purpose of the book review," which was identified in Gezezin's (2015) study. This absence may be attributed to disciplinary differences: whereas Gezezin analysed book reviews across multiple disciplines, the present study focused exclusively on reviews within Applied Linguistics. This suggests a degree of disciplinary consistency in how book reviews are constructed in this field. Writers in Applied Linguistics tend to begin their reviews by presenting overarching arguments or introducing the book or subject matter, rather than explicitly stating the purpose of the review, an approach more common in other academic domains.

Table 2

Schematic Structures of the Analysed Book Reviews

Generic Structure	Rhetorical Structure	Communicative Functions
Introducing the book [^]	General topic [^] Author(s) [^] Readership [^]	To define the general topic of the book To inform about the author To inform about the potential readership
Outlining the book [^]	Book insertion [^] Organisation [^] Topics [^]	To insert the book in the field To provide the general view of book's organisation To state the topic of each chapter
Highlighting parts of the book [^]	Extra text material [^] Focused evaluation [^]	To cite extra text material To provide a focused evaluation
Providing a closing evaluation	Recommendation [^]	To recommend the book To recommend the book despite its indicated shortcomings

Note: ^ means followed by

RQ2: What are the approaches predominantly practised by the BR writers?

The analyses also yielded novel findings regarding the approaches used by book review (BR) writers when composing reviews for publication. These approaches reflect how writers attended to and represented the essential content of the books they reviewed. Although the generic structures were consistently present across all BRs, beginning with an introduction to the book, followed by an outline of its contents, a discussion of key parts, and a closing evaluation, the ways in which writers organised their reviews varied. As shown in Table 3, four distinct approaches were identified. For the generic structures “outlining the book” and “highlighting parts of the book,” most writers structured their reviews according to the organisation of the book itself (book structure–led, 65.63%). Others centred their reviews around the book’s main ideas (content-led, 18.75%). A less frequently used approach involved guiding the review through a set of questions (question-led, 12.50%). Notably, only one writer organised the review according to the needs of the intended audience (reader-led, 3.12%), emphasising the theoretical and practical benefits of the book for specific readers. This finding represents a meaningful contribution to the literature on book reviews, as it offers further insight into the variability and strategic choices involved in BR composition, knowledge that may also inform the teaching of BR writing. The summary of these findings is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Approaches Predominantly Used in Writing BRs

Writing Approach	BRs (N = 32)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Book structure-led	BRs 1-11, 13-17, 19, 21-25, 27-28, & 30-31	21	65.63%
Content-led	BRs 12, 18, 20, 26, 29, & 32	6	18.75%
Question-led	BRs 14, 15, 16, & 17	4	12.50%
Reader-led	BR 31	1	03.12%

Book Structure-Led Approach

The book review (BR) writers predominantly employed a book structure–led approach. As illustrated in Excerpt 8, Walker’s (2019) review was organised according to the structure of the book, with each chapter summarised in sequence. This finding aligns with Benegas (2014), who notes that this approach enables BR writers to structure their reviews in parallel with the organisation of the book itself. Such alignment can be advantageous for writers, particularly in terms of idea organisation and overall text

coherence. Of the 32 BRs analysed, 21 (65.63%) adopted this approach, typically beginning with an introduction to the book and then providing a chapter-by-chapter overview. Clear examples of book structure–led reviews can be observed in the BRs by Wang (2015), Khezrlou (2015), England (2015), Mah (2015), and Walker (2018).

Excerpt 8

Chapter 2 presents a thought-provoking analysis on how social, political, and economic issues have given rise to four dynamics of the neoliberal university: Vocationalism, Globalization, Massification – the desire to recruit large volumes of students, and McDonaldization – how decisions in curriculum, staffing, and services are governed through mass production with a focus on efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.....in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 explains the emergence of Blended English for Academic Purposes (BLEAPs) professionals. Neither fully administrative, nor fully academic, BLEAPs perform administrative services such as, student support, service learning, innovation, and academic skills development (Whitchurch, 2008). Often hired on short-term contracts, they oversee people and projects but tend to have vaguely defined job descriptions and are often devoid of organisational authority. Hadley identifies three types of BLEAPs. They tend to resist neoliberal policies put forth by Command & Control.

(Walker, 2019, p.210)

Content-Led Approach

Another approach identified is the content-led approach. As the name suggests, BR writers employing this approach structure their reviews around the book’s key concepts or central ideas rather than following a chapter-by-chapter organisation (Yeo, 2016). A clear example of this approach can be seen in Fung’s (2019) review. After presenting the generic moves of introducing the book and outlining its organisation, Fung foregrounds several core concepts and uses these to guide the overall review. Unlike the book structure–led approach, which confines the review to a sequential, chapter-based format, the content-led approach allows thematic or conceptual elements to drive the organisation of the writing. For additional examples, see Hall (2016), Banegas (2016), Sykes (2017), and Steele (2018).

Excerpt 9

A key distinction McGrath makes is between coursebook-led and coursebook-based language courses. Whereas content in

coursebook-led courses is often delivered in lockstep, and is standardised and prescribed, the content in coursebook-based courses is open to modification and adaptation, depending on the particular needs of the learners. McGrath maintains only coursebook-based teaching is justifiable because the aim is to develop communicative competence. A valuable soundbite is McGrath's reminder to the experienced teachers who are the intended readership of this book, that it is important to question how the coursebook contributes to the aims of the course to ensure that the course does not become aimless.

Whilst McGrath acknowledges Scott Thornbury's Dogme stance of 2000, using just the teacher, student and environment of the classroom, he does not suggest abandoning the coursebook completely. Indeed, there appears to be some agreement with Thornbury when McGrath states that content should have salient, relevant and inherently interesting themes, with the best themes being those volunteered by the students. The key word used throughout the second edition is for materials to have relevance, which is considered by McGrath to be the *sine qua non* of materials selection, whether materials are verbal, textual or digital.

(Fung, 2019, p. 500)

Question-Led Approach

A "question-led approach" allows the BR writers to structure their BR by questions. In other words, it is similar to a question-response method of reviews. As illustrated in Excerpt 10, the only book review that followed this approach was that of Lewis (2018, p. 262) on "*Reflecting on Critical Incidents in Language Education: 40 Dilemmas for Novice TESOL Professionals*." The questions used to help structure the BR were (1) *Which professional book have you read recently that impressed you the most?* (2) *What aspects of the book did you find the most interesting?* and (3) *Who would you recommend read this book, and why?*

Excerpt 10

Which professional book have you read recently that impressed you the most?

To choose from the many great possibilities I narrowed down the criteria to one. What title could I recommend to people starting out in our field who might (just!) be still teaching at the time of the RELC Journal's centenary?

What aspects of the book did you find the most interesting?

My answer to the question could be summarised in three words: readable, wide-ranging, and balanced. The readability part is helped by the book's division into chunks. Each of the 10 chapters has four topics and each topic lends itself to interactive reading through inquiry questions, previews of the

issue, reflections on the issue and of course the critical incident (or dilemma) itself. This organisation means it can be used in teacher training programmes or in short workshops or as an individual reference by the novice teachers it addresses.

Lewis (2018, p. 262)

Indeed, the first question enabled the establishment of the generic structure of introducing the book. In contrast, the second question prompted the reviewer to focus on outlining and highlighting key aspects of the book. The final question was obviously generated for the recommendation construction. It is also important to note that this approach stemmed from an interview with an honorary research fellow, as mentioned in the book review.

Reader-Led Approach

The analyses further yielded that the final approach was “a reader-led approach.” This was normally constructed based on the perceived benefits of the book in relation to different groups of the potential readership. Lewis’s (2020) BR on “*Words that Go Ping: The Ridiculously Wonderful World of Onomatopoeia*” was structured specifically for different cohorts of readers. Emphasising the theoretical and pedagogical benefits of the book, Lewis began each paragraph stating, “*For translators,...*”, or “*For applied linguists,...*” to highlight the benefits of the book in relation to its target readers as illustrated in Excerpt 11.

Excerpt 11

For translators there are gems throughout the book but Chapter 10, ‘Huh? Lost in Translation’ will be particularly relevant. Amongst other points we are reminded of the difficulties of translating humour. No wonder some solve the problem by simply omitting onomatopoeic words, but this is a solution described by the author as ‘for the faint-hearted’ (p. 163)...(p. 164)?

For applied linguists the book’s content may fill a gap, since the author justifies her choice of topic by saying that in all her years of studying applied linguistics she found that onomatopoeia ‘wasn’t considered worthy of “serious” attention’ (p. 185)...

(Lewis, 2020, p. 457)

Notably, the variation in approaches identified through the analysis can be attributed to several factors. First, such diversity may stem from individual writers’ stylistic preferences or personal approaches to text composition. Some reviewers might find the commonly used approach unengaging and thus opt for alternative organisational strategies. During the

revision process, BR writers may also encounter challenges in articulating their ideas, prompting adjustments to the structure of the review. Lewis (2020) highlights that, while prestigious academic journals typically provide explicit guidelines for research articles, few offer comparable guidance for book reviews. This lack of standardisation may help explain the dynamic and varied approaches observed in the BRs analysed in *Applied Linguistics*. A second explanation is that writers may intentionally shift their focus to the most salient aspects of the book to benefit the target readership. Rather than following a chapter-by-chapter format, some reviewers may choose to centre the review on key themes or contributions they deem more meaningful or relevant. These phenomena reflect what Swales (2004) refers to as the dynamicity of genres, namely, that genres are flexible and subject to change over time. Similarly, Paltridge and Starfield (2024) emphasise the evolving nature of academic text production, particularly in doctoral dissertation writing, and demonstrate that even well-established genres can change. The findings of the present analysis align with this conception of genre evolution, illustrating that variability persists even within genres traditionally considered stable.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study aimed to analyse book reviews in the field of *Applied Linguistics*, a topic that remains underexplored in the literature. This analysis was also conducted to capture the dynamic nature of the genre, as Swales (2004) notes that generic and rhetorical structures may evolve over time. The findings of this study are expected to be valuable for the development of writing materials for undergraduate students in language studies. After analysing 32 book reviews obtained from the *RELC Journal*, four generic structures and their associated sub-rhetorical moves were identified. These include: (1) introducing the book (General topic[^], Author(s)[^], Readership[^], Book insertion[^]); (2) outlining the book (Organisation[^], Topics[^], Extra text material[^]); (3) highlighting parts of the book (Focused evaluation[^]); and (4) providing a closing evaluation (Recommendation[^]). Specific to generic structures 2 and 3, book review writers employed multiple strategies to compose their content. Most reviews were organised according to the book's structure, while others were structured around the book's key content. The BR writers employed multiple approaches in composing their content in the review. That is, most of them organised their reviews using the book structure, while some organised theirs around the book's key content. The last two interesting approaches were that the questions were used to guide the review, and that the review's structure was organised around the benefits to a specific group of readers. This may

reflect how dynamic and flexible book reviews are in the contemporary world. These findings underscore the flexibility and dynamic nature of contemporary book reviews.

The taxonomical structure established in this study has practical implications for writing instruction. At the undergraduate level, students can apply these structures to compose their own book reviews. Such taxonomies serve as scaffolding, helping students understand how texts are organised. Consistent with a genre-based approach, previous studies have shown that following established text structures improves students' writing performance (e.g., Kongpetch, 2003, 2006; Payaprom, 2012). Moreover, Hammond and Macken-Hoorick (1999) argue that exposure to genre-based instruction contributes to later social interaction and successful language performance by providing students with both learning and communicative resources. Another key implication is that the BR taxonomy can enhance students' writing confidence in a target language. Writing in a second language inevitably presents challenges, including issues with text composition. By following research-informed structures, students can reduce writing anxiety and develop a more confident academic voice. In this way, language teachers can utilise the taxonomy as an effective scaffold in writing instruction.

Despite the meaningful findings, the present study inevitably has its limitations. First, the scope of text selection is a primary concern, as the dataset includes only six years of published book reviews. As noted earlier, the analysis aimed to provide a holistic picture of contemporary book reviews and the approaches their writers employ. Future research may address this limitation by examining a broader time frame to offer a more comprehensive account of the BR literature. Another limitation concerns the journal selection, as the study included book reviews from only one reputable journal. Future studies may benefit from incorporating book reviews from multiple top-tier Applied Linguistics journals to enhance the generalisability and robustness of the findings.

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