



Evaluation in Context

Geoff Thompson & Laura Alba-Juez (eds).

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Detaching oneself from authors, experiences and circumstances when writing a book review is always difficult, but on this occasion more than ever: GEOFF THOMPSON passed away suddenly and too early last November, and those of us who had the privilege to share his knowledge and enjoy his company during the meetings of the EMO-FUNDETT project at the UNED¹, will not forget his extraordinary human and professional qualities. *Evaluation in Context*, coedited with LAURA ALBA-JUEZ, the project's principal researcher, is part of his scholarly legacy.

The volume is better appreciated as a sequel of *Evaluation in Text* (2000), an Applied Linguistics milestone put out jointly by editors SUSAN HUNSTON and GEOFF THOMPSON, and mainly informed by three linguistics strands in the service of Discourse Analysis to study evaluative language: Corpus Linguistics, Narratology and Systemic Functional Grammar. With the perspective of hindsight, an organic reading of the two books enables us to perceive their different foci and scopes, as well as the vertiginous enrichment of Discourse Analysis, over more than a decade, thanks to the convergence of multiple interdisciplinary approaches and theoretical frameworks. If *Evaluation in Text* defined evaluative functions on the ideational, interpersonal and textual planes², detailed their major devices³, and dealt with their effect (i.e. persuasion) in a reduced spectrum of texts, *Evaluation in Context* revisits the notion of evaluation, contrasts it with those of 'stance', 'attitude' and 'appraisal', and looks closely into its many *faces, phases, and outcomes*, demarcating a myriad scenarios where it may occur and expanding the existing repertoires of research methods and evaluative devices. Who said second parts are no good?

The editors have divided the nineteen-chapter collection into three distinctive sections: an explanatory introduction, a compilation of methodologies and approaches to evaluation, and a fresh catalogue of contexts where it takes place. In their introduction, entitled 'The many faces and phases of evaluation', THOMPSON and ALBA-JUEZ diachronically track

the interest in evaluation inside and outside Linguistics, and emphasise the fact that it may display many guises, more or less overt or covert, more or less complex (i.e. monomodal or multimodal, verbal and non-verbal), and of a varied nature (e.g. irony and humour in general) across semiotic modes, channels, disciplinary and national cultures, genres, communicative situations and linguistic levels (i.e. phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic). In addition to the versatility of this visible guise, *face* or *textual phase*, the editors also stress the stage at which speakers, writers and performers decide whether to fulfil the evaluative act, how, and with what stance. This stage is termed '*pre-textual phase*', and in it the sender evaluates his/her *evaluative intertext* (that is, previous instances of evaluation experienced) and its repercussions on the addressee, together with the contextual variables in order to opt for avoiding or incurring a FTA (face threatening act). Put simply, for choosing to align with the interlocutor or transgress politeness conventions.

The updated definition of evaluation stemming from this kaleidoscopic perspective is one that ranks the concept as a *ubiquitous, dynamic and situated superordinate* subsuming stance, appraisal, connotation and attitude along a continuum from implicitness to explicitness. One that underlines the inescapable character of the notion, because the absence of evaluation, like the absence of modality, is *per se* an evaluating act, and when it exists, involves the evaluation of past evaluations. Evaluative recurrence and recursiveness are amply discussed in the next section (chapters 3 and 4, by GEOFF THOMPSON and MARY MACKEN-HORARIK and ANNE ISAAC).

Under the heading 'Theoretical considerations and approaches to evaluation', the nine chapters composing the second section provide the reader with a solid theoretical and methodological scaffold that includes Axiological Semantics, Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereinafter SFL), and productive *blends* of Pragmatics with other linguistic disciplines and methods. Axiological Semantics is present in ÁNGEL FELICES-LAGO's historical review within chapter 2 and in the application of this linguistic field to natural language processing in chapter 6, co-written by him and MARÍA ENRIQUETA CORTÉS-DE-LOS-RÍOS. SFL is critically approached to signal taxonomical mismatches, overlaps and potential conflicts between categories and systems, as does GEOFF THOMPSON in chapter 3 with the judgement and appreciation systems and MARY MACKEN-HORARIK and ANNE ISAAC with attitude and graduation in chapter 4. The following chapters offer useful pragmatic merges that open up untapped research

avenues: LAURA ALBA-JUEZ and SALVATORE ATTARDO's (chapter 5) fuse Pragmatics, Reception studies and Cognition to determine the evaluative underpinnings of verbal irony and delve into its perception by members of different cultural communities, and ISTVAN KECSKES (chapter 7) combines Pragmatics with Conversational Analysis, Semantics, and Intercultural Communication to find out how contextual constraints affect the evaluation of politeness inherent in situation-bound utterances (SBUs for short), which are culture-specific and highly ritualistic pragmatic units, when transferred to intercultural interactions. Finally along this line, the alliance of Pragmatics, Reception studies and Prosody yields insightful discussions such as the one contributed by VICTORIA ESCANDELL-VIDAL, VICTORIA MARRERO AGUIAR and PILAR PÉREZ OCÓN (chapter 8) on the relationship between informational structure and the prosodic marking of certain attitudinal values (insistence and impatience), or the one derived from EVA ESTEBAS-VILAPLANA's examination (chapter 9) of the perception of politeness and rudeness, based on pitch range, by English and Spanish informants.

As suggested by the title, the phenomenon of evaluation is tackled in use, and thus the contexts presented in the third section range from academic blogs (MARIANNA RYSHINA-PANKOVA's chapter) and scientific writing, namely, the influence of disciplines on evaluative expression in research articles, studied by STEFANIA DEGAETANO-ORTLIEB and ELKE TEICH, and the synergic role of modality and negation in Darwin's work, investigated by LAURA HIDALGO-DOWNING, to areas as diverse as advertising, consumer feedback, personal narratives, social web interactions, or political discourse. More specifically, with the academic and scientific settings already mentioned, the volume intertwines a number of other captivating topics, most of them under-researched: the blurb advertising of TV series on the back of DVD box sets (MONIKA BEDNAREK's contribution), the reviews of books and movies written by consumers in web pages (MARTA CARRETERO and MAITE TABOADA's), the emotion narratives recorded from agony column radio programmes (MANUELA ROMANO's), the expression of attitude and positive politeness by youth in a social networking site, Facebook (CARMEN SANTAMARÍA-GARCÍA's), the multimodal coverage of religious controversies by the online press (RUTH BREEZE's), the patterns and distribution of verbal evaluation in weekly news magazines (ELENA MARTÍNEZ CARO's), and the variation of evaluative choices, according to the parameters of political party and gender, in the parliamentary debates examined by DONNA R. MILLER and JANE H. JOHNSON.

The scientific rigour of the contributions and their crafted assembly turn this book into a second landmark in the area of evaluation studies and into an invaluable asset to Discourse Analysis. Remarkable aspects to be highlighted are its panoramic standpoint, which comprises both historical reviews and the current ‘e-evaluation’ (page 13) inside cyber communities, its revised definition of the concept of evaluation, which takes into account the multifaceted reality of the phenomenon – its manifold realisations, objects of study (e.g. suprasegmental features) and contexts, its refinement and criticism of established frameworks (Functionalism, for example), and the expansion of theoretical approaches (e.g. with the Dynamical System Theory⁴ as all-embracing framework and the ‘pragmatic blends’ enumerated above) and research tools.

In these ways *Evaluation in Context* strengthens the fabric of research into evaluation and, despite its recent emergence on the market, serves as a matrix of reference where to insert works devoted to more restrictively focused tokens, such as academic and specialised professional texts, the former being a notably fertile research ground. Among these works, *Academic Discourse—New Insights into Evaluation* (2004), *Academic Evaluation: Review Genres in University Settings* (2009), *Point of View: Description and Evaluation across Discourses* (2009), *Constructing Interpersonality: Multiple Perspectives on Written Academic Genres* (2010), *Appraising Research: Evaluation in Academic Writing* (2010), *Crossed Words: Criticism in Scholarly Writing* (2011), *Stance and Voice in Written Academic Genres* (2012), *Interpersonality in Legal Genres* (2014), and *Dialogicity in Written Specialised Genres* (2014) are representative titles that will find in *Evaluation in Context* an illuminating encompassing connection.

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NOTES

¹ The acronym stands for NATIONAL DISTANCE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY of Spain. For more information about the EMO-FUNDETT project see <http://www.uned.es/proyectofundett/>

² These evaluative functions are, respectively, *stance*, *engagement*, and *discourse organisation*, the latter accomplished mostly through metadiscourse and in turn subservient to the other two.

³ Such devices are, among others, adverbial and adjectival markers, verbs denoting behavioural, mental or relational processes, nouns, negative polarity, clausal relationships, narrative in-telling and post-telling involvement on the teller's part, and narrative rhetoric, topic selection and telling context and performance.

⁴ Originally a mathematical theory aimed at modelling complex phenomena by means of differential and difference equations, DST is also employed to describe and explain cognitive and pragmatic behaviours, since they result from the dynamical interaction of brains, bodies and environments.