Appraisal Analysis: Linguistic Features of Reviews in English

アプレイザル分析：英語批評の言語学的特徴

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Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to analyze the English language features of two reviews written for the same film from linguistic perspectives. One was written by a film critic in the form of an online newspaper article, while the other was randomly selected from user reviews posted on an online film database. The language use of the two reviews was analyzed by Appraisal—in systemic functional linguistics, a framework for analyzing evaluative uses of language (White, 2011; White, 2015).

Theoretical Background

Appraisal is known as a system of interpersonal meanings that is concerned with the evaluation of things or people for negotiating the writer/speaker's social relationships (Martin & Rose, 2007). Individual speakers/writers express their feelings, adopt particular positions, and negotiate their social stances with either actual or potential respondents (Martin & Rose, 2007; White, 2011; White, 2015). Appraisal provides techniques for the systematic analysis of evaluation and stance by exploring how speakers/writers' attitudes, judgements, and emotive responses are presented in texts (White, 2011; White, 2015).

Appraisal consists of three subtypes: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation (White, 2015). Attitude refers to speakers/writers' intersubjective values, by which they pass judgments and associate emotional/affectual responses with participants and processes (White, 2015). Engagement covers linguistic resources that introduce additional voices into a discourse to position texts' proposals and propositions inter-subjectively (Martin & Rose, 2007; White, 2015). Graduation is concerned with grading phenomena whereby speakers/writers' feelings are amplified, and categories are blurred (Martin & White, 2005). These subtypes are further categorized into subclasses as follows.

First, Attitude can be grouped into three broad semantic domains: Affect, Judgement, and

Appreciation (White, 2011; White, 2015). Affect is concerned with emotional responses that indicate the positive or negative views of the speakers/writers (White 2011, White, 2015) and has both Authorial (first person) and Non-authorial (second and third person) functions (White, 2015). While Authorial Affect shows the speaker/writer's subjective evaluation through emotional responses, Non-authorial Affect allows them to transfer their responsibility of assessment to an external source rather than their own emotion (White, 2015). Judgement serves to evaluate the social acceptability of human behavior positively or negatively based on normative principles or morality (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2011; White, 2015). Appreciation evaluates objects and products rather than human behavior, by referencing aesthetic principles and social value (White, 2015).

Second, Engagement can be divided into four categories: Disclaim, Proclaim, Probabilise, and Attribute (or Attribution) (White, 2015). The first three are categorized as Intra-vocalisation, where responsibility for arguability remains with the internal voice of the speaker/writer, while the last is regarded as Extra-vocalisation, which quotes or references the statements or points of view of external sources (White, 2015). More specifically, Disclaim positions the speaker/writer at odds with—or not fully agreeing with—what someone else said or wrote (Alvin, n.d.; Martin & White, 2005; White, 2015); it rejects, supplants, or dismisses invoked dialogic contrary positions (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2015). Proclaim represents the position as highly warrantable to suppress or rule out alternative positions (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2011; White, 2015). Probabilise represents the current proposition or proposal as one of a range of possible propositions or proposals (White, 2015). Attribute allows the speaker/writer to acknowledge that there are alternative positions to his or her own position by representing propositions as grounded in the subjecthood of an external voice (Alvin, n.d.; White, 2011).

Third, Graduation has two kinds of resources: Force and Focus (White, 2015). Force is concerned with adjusting the volume of gradable items and enables the intensity of a message to be raised or lowered by a choice of words and expressions (Alvin, n.d.; Martin & Rose, 2007). Focus is a resource for making something that is inherently non-gradable gradable and sharpens or blurs the message to make the meaning either more or less precise (Alvin, n.d.; Martin & Rose, 2007).

Results and Discussion

Attitude

As shown in Figure 1, Appreciation is the most common among the three variables in both types of texts. This is not surprising because both texts were written to evaluate the film. As explained by Martin and Rose (2007), films are one of the things people show their attitudes toward by Appreciation. However, while Judgement is more frequently used in Text A (critic review) than in Text B (user review), Text B uses more Affect than Text A. This suggests that Text A reviews the film based on normative principles, whereas Text B has more emotional tones. This finding is supported by the data shown in Figure 2, which show that Text A includes only Non-authorial Affect, while Authorial Affect accounts for the majority of Affect in Text B.

Figure 1

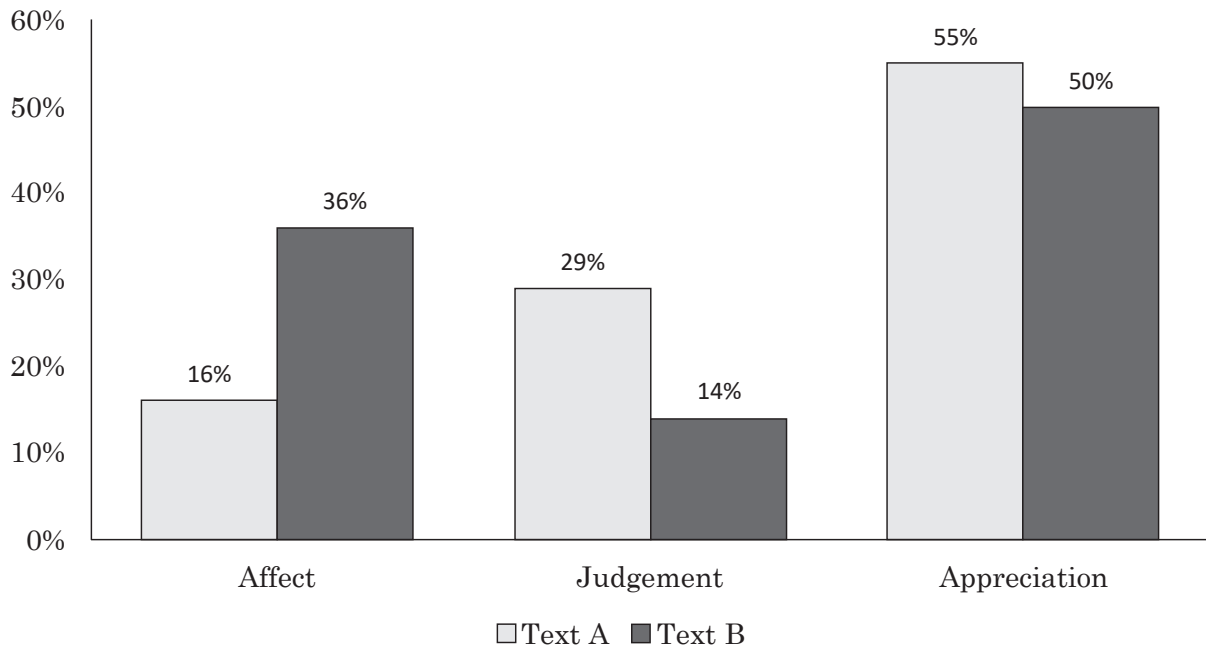*Comparison of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation*

Figure 2

Proportion of Authorial and Non-authorial Affects

Engagement

Overall, Text A and B have similar Engagement trends. Figure 3 shows that Disclaim accounts for the majority of the Intra-vocalisation values in both texts. This indicates that both texts utilize contrary positions to make effective arguments. Additionally, while neither of the texts use Proclaim, both texts use Probabilise. This is probably because both reviewers try to avoid assertive communication and show readers that their film reviews are only one of many.

Figure 3
Comparison of Disclaim, Proclaim, and Probabilise (Intra-vocalisation)
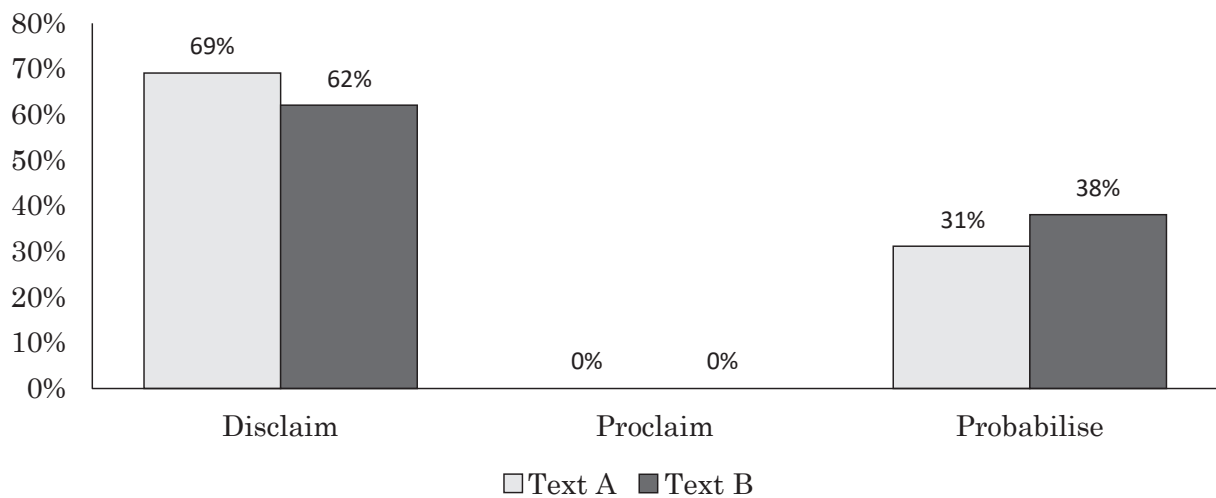
Graduation

As shown in Figure 4, Text B contains more expressions associated with Graduation than Text A (see Total). In particular, although Focus is not often used in neither of the texts, Text B uses informal words or expressions as Force, including expressions shown in all capital letters, such as "OMG" and "DEFINITELY," which are supposed to be avoided in formal writing. This suggests that Text A is more formal, while Text B uses informal expressions to intensity one's own arguments.

Figure 4
Proportion of Force and Focus

	Focus	Force	Total
☐Text A	0.69%	2.52%	3.20%
■Text B	0.25%	5.78%	6.03%
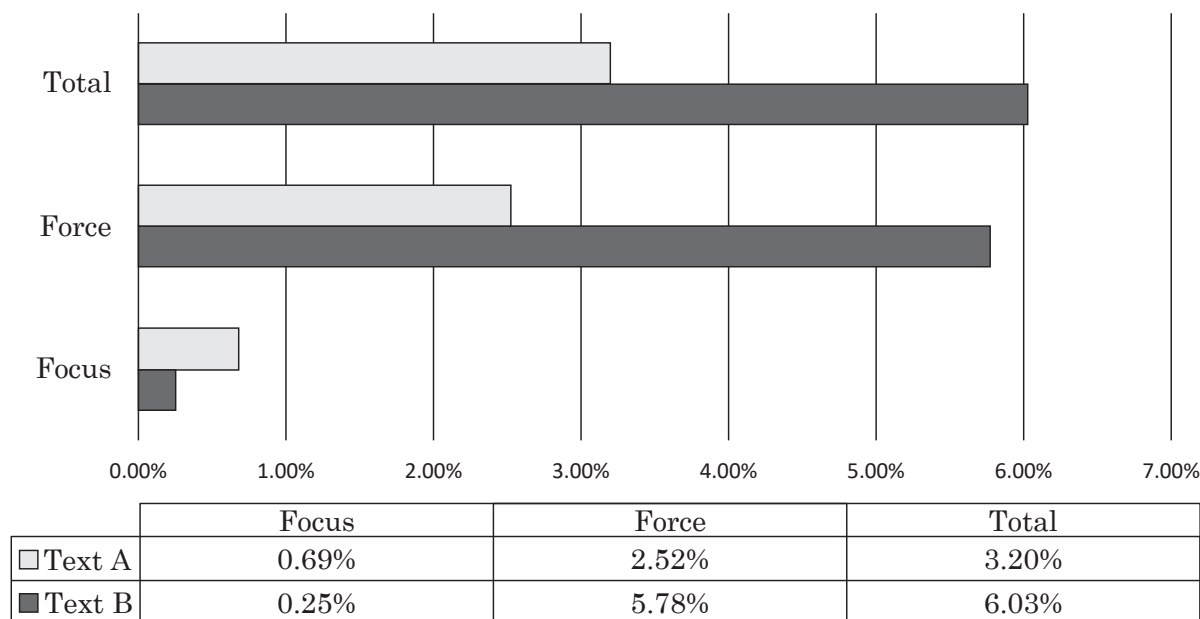
Conclusion

This research adopted Appraisal to analyze linguistic features of two types of reviews (a critic review and a user review). The findings suggest that Text A (critic review) and Text B (user review) show both similarities and differences. Although both reviews were written for the same purpose (i.e., to evaluate the film) and tried to make arguments effectively on their own, the way in which each author delivered his/her message was different. While the Text A reviewer avoided mentioning himself/herself as the source of the assessment, the Text B reviewer used more subjective and emotional expressions. This may be because critic reviews are supposed to be more objective than user reviews; readers would expect professional critics to be as objective and impartial as possible and assume that online users could make subjective arguments as they like. Overall, this research shows how Appraisal helps understand the meanings and social relationships associated with language use.

References

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