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# Evaluation in academic discourse: Managing criticism in Japanese and English book reviews

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### Abstract

Evaluative language features prominently in academic discourse, especially in book reviews. Previous studies have suggested that the use of criticism and its mitigation devices may be culturally bound. However, so far, there has been no study which explicitly compares the use of criticism in Japanese and English book reviews. This paper investigates how criticism is managed in English and Japanese book reviews. An analysis of a corpus of twenty English and twenty Japanese book reviews in the field of linguistics shows that while there are similarities, there are distinctive differences. At the global level, praise is more prominently used in English book reviews to establish solidarity and rapport while apology and self-denigration are used in Japanese reviews. At the local level, *“rhetorical questions”*, *“self-denigration”*, *“recasting problems as potential for future research”* and *“attributing problems to the next*

generationâ€™ are used only in Japanese reviews. The study explores the importance of taking into account both ethnic culture and small cultures in interpreting empirical data from two languages.



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## Keywords

Criticism; Academic discourse; Language of evaluation; Face; Mitigation devices; Japanese culture

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**Hiroko Itakura** is an Assistant Professor in Department of English Language and Literature at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research interest includes discourse analysis, pragmatics, and language and gender. Her previous research has been published in journals including *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *Language in Society*, and *System*.

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† The article is an expanded version of the authors'™ previous study ([Itakura and Tsui, 2009](#)).

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