A cross-cultural comparison of Evaluation between concert reviews in Hong Kong and British Newspapers

Review Genres

- “the public evaluation” (Lindholm-Romantschuk, 1998) of intellectual / artistic outputs (books, films, concerts, exhibitions, computer software)
- “provide a platform” for members of a discourse community to share ideas and analyses (Hyland & Diani, 2009)
- Were neglected, more studies in recent years, mostly on academic book reviews

Focus of this study

- Music criticism - classical concert reviews
- Hong Kong Chinese vs. British English
- The use of positive and negative evaluative acts
- Textual analysis + in-depth interviews with music critics

Significance

Why music?

- Musicology is an understudied disciplinary area of written discourse studies
- Scarcity in studies of humanities, especially music
- Previous research in music: Record reviews (Ha 2011)
- Forthcoming research: Concert reviews (Ha in preparation)

Concert reviews

- A prominent genre in music criticism
- Fills a research gap: evaluative features of music criticism
- Professional / general audience (concert reviews majorly published in popular media today)
- Set in a wider cultural/social context (e.g. media, commercial)
- Pedagogical value

The Corpora

- UK English Newspapers:

- Hong Kong Chinese Newspapers:
  The Hong Kong Economic Journal (信報), Ming Pao (明報), Ta Kung Pao (大公報)

- Why these newspapers?
  - Largest numbers of concert reviews published over 10 years
  - Many reviewers - results not dominated by few reviewers and their individual styles of writing

The Corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Reviews</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of reviewers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of characters/words</td>
<td>53416</td>
<td>198793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of characters/words per review</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>1525</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selecting criteria
To minimise variables:

- **Single concert** ONLY
- **Western classical music** ONLY (no folk, jazz, pop, metal, new age, etcetera)
- **NO Chinese classical music**

Methods

- **Qualitative data analysis**: a hand-tagged analysis of evaluative acts (praise / criticism), background comments on aspects other than the concert itself (positive and negative), and non-evaluative remarks; using Nvivo
- **Quantitative data analysis**: using SPSS to compare and contrast the statistics
- **Initial framework** (majorly based on Hyland 2000)
  - Mitigation strategies: praise-criticism pair, hedging, personal attribution, other attribution, implication.

Principles regarding coding
(Hyland 2000; Ha 2011)

- A clause/paragraph containing more than one positive/negative semantic item will be coded as one instance of evaluation if it only refers to a single aspect of the concert under review.
  - Unmitigated praise/performance
  - Her voice was strong and the articulation was clear.
- Every evaluative strategy will be counted if more than one appear in a single clause/sentence.
  - The music, all played far more expertly than it deserves by the London Symphony Orchestra under Daniel Harding (are they really that short of work?) was profoundly depressing.
    - Praise - booster/performance;
      - Criticism - booster, impoliteness / composition

Analytical framework (Praise)

Observations: Similarities (English vs. Chinese reviews)

Specific evaluation largely exceeds Global evaluation
Global praise > Global criticism
The similarities suggest that

- Music criticism is a genre that serves similar purposes across cultures
- Professional culture seems to be stronger than national influences

English vs. Chinese reviews: Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of concert evaluative acts per review</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of praise acts vs. criticism acts per review</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinese reviews contain more evaluation
Differences

**English:** specific praise > specific criticism

**Chinese:** specific praise < specific criticism

---

**Aspects of a concert reviews comment on Concert Management**

- Programme
- Venue
- Composer/composition
- Performer/performance
- Acoustics
- Instrument
- Audience behaviour
- Programme notes
- Concert Management

---

**Possible explanations for the differences**

- Differences in editorial policies, esp. restriction on word length
- Hong Kong critics are harsher (?)

---

**Conclusion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of evaluative acts</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive comments</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative comments</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews opening remarks</td>
<td>95 (63.33%)</td>
<td>75 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews closing remarks</td>
<td>104 (69%)</td>
<td>94 (62.67%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though general trends suggest more similarities than differences between English and Chinese reviews,

More differences are expected to be found in the way specific strategies are realised.

---

**References**

- Gosden, Hugh. 2001. “Thank you for your critical comments and helpful suggestions”: compliance and conflict in authors' replies to referees’ comments in peer reviews of scientific research papers. _BMC Med._ 1:11.

---

**Thank You!**

Fong-wa Ha
University of Essex
fwha@essex.ac.uk
References


References


Moreno, Ana I & Lorena Suárez. 2008a. A study of critical attitude across English and Spanish journals. Text 25.723


Journal of Business and Technical Communication 21.188


