A Comparative Study of Criticism in English and Japanese Sociolinguistic Book Reviews

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Abstract

Scholarly articles for academic journals are generally evaluated by peer reviewers before being accepted for publication. However, academic books can be published without having been assessed by third parties. Instead, after the book has been published, academic book reviews are written to evaluate the published books. In writing book reviews, reviewers need to show solidarity with authors and readers in terms of linguistic politeness. Particularly when writing criticism, reviewers need to choose their language carefully and mitigate criticism to avoid face-threatening acts, and by doing so they tend to use a negative politeness strategy.

As such, this study analyses the ways in which writers in English and Japanese write criticism in Japanese sociolinguistic book reviews. The results show that the number of criticism appearing in English and Japanese sociolinguistic book reviews differs, and that in writing criticism there are socio-cultural differences between English and Japanese sociolinguistic book reviews. The ways in which English and Japanese reviewers reduce the imposition and degree of forcefulness of their criticism in academic book reviews sometimes differ. Reviewers in English use hedges more frequently than Japanese reviewers. Reviewers in English tend to use hedges of adverbial and adjectival phrases, lexical verbs, modal auxiliary verbs, and contrast strategies, whereas reviewers in Japanese tend to use hedges of adverbial phrases, lexical verbs, conditional constructions, question forms, and personal attributions. Multiple hedges appear in most English criticisms, while approximately half of Japanese criticisms use multiple hedges in a single sentence. Instead, Japanese reviewers use more indirect forms of

expression in their criticism.

The writing conventions of criticism seem to differ between English and Japanese languages. To accurately understand the author's real intentions, non-native speakers need to be more aware of cultural conventions and linguistic strategies in writing criticism in their target languages.

Key words: criticism, politeness strategy, academic writing, English and Japanese languages

1. Introduction

Scholars worldwide interact with each other in the academic society. Some non-native English scholars have experienced studying abroad, and have studied academic writing and gained writing skills for specific purposes. They might also have published research papers in English. However, as in spoken language, the ways in which scholars discuss and express opinions when making claims in their academic writing can differ across languages and cultures.

Cultural differences in writing conventions have been shown to be different between native and non-native speakers in academic writing (Hinkel, 1994). In a study of 146 ESL (English as Second Language) students and 28 native English speakers responding to questionnaires by writing their opinions and reasons in English, Hinkel (1994: 370) revealed that English writing conventions require rational argumentation, justification and proof as concepts and frameworks in writing, which other writing traditions in Asia do not require. Consequently, writing of non-native speakers might lack clarity and adequate support in terms of English academic writing conventions (Hinkel, 1994).

Also in Japanese speech interaction it is often said that Japanese speakers sometimes choose silence and use indirect expressions in order to avoid explicitly stating their opinions and thus soften them. In this respect, Doi (1971) describes the ambiguity in silence as a privilege in Japanese society. This cultural notion might be reflected to some degree in the number of criticisms written by Japanese reviewers and the ways that the

Japanese express criticism in writing.

When reviewing others' work, reviewers are generally careful in their use of language. Peer review comments in academic articles and academic book reviews consist of both compliments and criticism, since reviewers are concerned about a face-threatening act towards authors and readers in terms of politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and they try to maintain a solidarity relationship with them. Positive and negative politeness as used in the analysis of linguistic politeness have been examined in academic papers and academic book reviews (Hyland, 2000, 2005; Johnson & Roen, 1992; Myers, 1989). For instance, criticism has been analysed as a sequence of praise and criticism in peer reviews or book reviews across different languages, including Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese (Alcaraz-Ariza, 2002; Hyland, 2000; Itakura, 2013; Itakura & Tsui, 2009; Kong, 2006; Moreno & Suárez, 2008; Salager-Meyer et al., 2007). Furthermore, in academic articles writers are concerned with politeness, employing various strategies to establish solidarity and reduce their attribution by using hedges (Myers, 1989).

Therefore, this study will analyse the ways in which reviewers in English and Japanese express criticism in sociolinguistic book reviews in order to reveal the extent to which cultural communicative notions in English and Japanese are reflected in writing academic book reviews. The first part of the study will examine previous studies of politeness strategies with regard to criticism in academic articles and book reviews. Thereafter, the methodology of this study will be introduced. Finally, similarities and differences between English and Japanese criticism in the book reviews of sociolinguistic journals will be discussed in the results section in relation to linguistic politeness.

2. Writing criticism in academic book reviews

In academic writing, book review writers need to consider readers and authors so that they can create and maintain a relationship of solidarity with them when engaging their interaction. In order to build a harmonious relationship with readers and authors, a politeness strategy is often used (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Myers, 1989). Minimizing imposition and showing

deference by not mentioning 'I am an expert' can help soften a face-threatening act (Johnson & Roen, 1992). For example, engaging in politeness strategies, reviewers might use plural pronouns, such as 'we', emphasis, repetitions, and compliments to express their positive politeness and create solidarity towards readers and authors, while they use indirect expressions as forms of negative politeness, including hedges, questions, and self-denigration to mitigate face-threatening acts and soften their claims (Hyland, 2000, 2005; Itakura, 2013; Itakura & Tsui, 2009, 2011; Myers, 1989).

Especially in academic reviews, negative criticism which can be a potential face-threatening act for the scholar is sometimes employed; hence reviewers tend to offer praise before introducing criticism to mitigate this face-threatening act (Hyland, 2000; Johnson & Roen, 1992). Stylistic features of the language used in criticism in academic reviews have been analysed in English (Alcaraz-Ariza, 2002; Hyland, 2000; Myers, 1989), Spanish (Moreno & Suárez, 2008; Salager-Meyer & Alcaraz Ariza, 2004), French (Salager-Meyer & Alcaraz Ariza, 2004; Salager-Meyer et al., 2007), Chinese (Kong, 2006), and Japanese (Itakura & Tsui, 2011).

In a study of a large corpus of English academic book reviews across different fields from applied linguistics to biology, Hyland (2000) proposed six strategies to mitigate negative evaluations, such as the use of praise-criticism pairs, hedging, reviewers' personal responsibility, attribution of others such as readers' acceptance of criticism as a common ground, using metadiscourse, and indirectness as shown in the examples below. Hyland (2000: 59) refers to metadiscourse as aspects of the text that explicitly refer to either the organisation of the discourse, or the writer's stance towards its content or the reader.

Examples mitigating negative criticism in Hyland's study (2000)
(1) *Offering praise before criticism*: 'Undoubtedly this book will be a valuable reference work, but it has also missed an opportunity'; 'There are some very good essays in this collection, but considered as a whole the book does have significant shortcomings'.
(2) *Hedging*: '... it could plausibly be retorted that what seems attractive about it are just ...'; 'This seems a somewhat curious proposition given

the thesis …'.

(3) *Personal attribution as a personal opinion*: 'This section suffers, in my opinion, from the circularity of including …'; 'I have to say that I think that it does not meet fully this very ambitious claim'.

(4) *Sharing a common ground with readers*: … some readers may regret the absence of other advanced topics'; '… also leave the reader with some feelings of discomfort'.

(5) *Metadiscourse*: 'A few weaknesses can also be noted'; 'One small criticism would be that …'.

(6) *Indirectness*: 'I found the book reasonably well written'; 'This is in many respects a good book'.
(Hyland, 2000: 55-59)

Hedges are commonly used in criticism of academic writing. They soften a writer's claim and help anticipate the negative consequences of overstatements (Hyland, 1998). Hyland (1998: 2) explains that "hedges represent a weakening of a claim through an explicit qualification of the writer's commitment, and this may be to show doubt and indicate that information is presented as opinion rather than accredited fact, or it may be to convey deference, humility, and respect for collegues views". The writers' stance is expressed in a humble way; thus hedges are used as a negative politeness strategy whereby writers try not to impose on authors and readers. Hinkel (2005) and Hyland (1998) explain that such uses constitute a reader-oriented claim.

Writers tend to use several grammatical forms and metadiscourse devices when mitigating their criticism. In a study of hedges in which Alcaraz-Ariza (2002) examined 30 medical book reviews, 190 negative speech acts were used to indicate consideration for readers and authors. Hedges used in the results included sentence adverbials such as 'rather' (see example 7), adjectives and adverbs of probability such as 'probable' and 'probably' (see example 8), adverbs of degree such as 'almost', attitude markers such as 'unfortunately', epistemic verbs such as 'seem', and suggestions such as 'would have been' (Alcaraz-Ariza, 2002: 147). Moreover, singular and plural self-reference pronouns, indirect forms, adjectives and

adverbs with prefixes, modal auxiliary verbs, impersonal constructions, praise-criticism or criticism-praise forms, and shifting strategy were used to express criticism (Alcaraz-Ariza, 2002) (see example 9). Hedging has been applied with a modal auxiliary verb to avoid using *be*-verbs to explicitly make statements using the politeness strategy (Myers,1989).

Examples of hedges in Alcaraz-Ariza's study (2002)
(7) 'This is not my central point. <u>Rather</u>, it is that her account is an insufficient one for the purposes of presenting a picture of healthcare accountability in Britain'.
(8) '<u>*Probably*</u> *– politicians are too often fooled by their own rhetoric*'.
(9) 'The choice of words is always intensely individual and *many of those suggested <u>will</u> <u>seem</u> awkward to <u>some</u> <u>readers,</u> but the enthusiasm of the authors is infectious and their encouragement to select and try just two or three is persuasive*'.
(Alcaraz-Ariza, 2002: 143)

There are several cross-cultural studies of criticism in academic book reviews. In a comparative study between English and Spanish, Moreno and Suárez (2008) analysed criticism in 20 English and 20 Spanish book reviews of literature in structural units to measure the reviewers' positive and negative evaluations such as compliments and criticism. Both English and Spanish criticisms of book reviews referred to books and chapters in general. Moreno and Suárez (2008) revealed that reviewers of English book reviews used four times as many critical acts as Spanish reviewers, suggesting that Anglo-American book reviewers tend to use both positive and negative evaluations; which was more balanced than Spanish reviewers, who preferred more positive evaluations and gave less negative criticism (Moreno & Suárez, 2008).

In the Asian context, Kong (2006) examined both positive and negative evaluations in English and Chinese research articles, applying semantic analysis in the humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences. He found that Chinese writers tended to be more explicit, while English writers tended to be more implicit (Kong, 2006: 207). His results showed that in comprehensibility,

the Chinese writers tended to use adverbial phrases frequently, such as 'clearly', 'precisely', and 'obviously'; predicative adjectives, such as 'obvious' and 'incomprehensible'. In desirability for articles they tended to use verbs, such as 'ignore', 'lack' and 'do/does not consider', which led to differences in explicitness between Chinese and English.

Nevertheless, in Japanese academic book reviews, Japanese reviewers tend to use negative politeness strategies while using linguistic mitigating devices to soften their expressions and criticism. In a cross-cultural study of 20 English and 20 Japanese book reviews in linguistics, Itakura and Tsui (2011) found that book reviewers in English used more criticism than book reviewers in Japanese. As the examples below indicate, Japanese reviewers used apology and self-denigration more frequently than English reviewers. They sometimes used rhetorical questions, whereby they were able to shift criticism from themselves to the readers. On the other hand, their study revealed that hypothetical statements with if-clauses were most frequently used in the English reviews (Itakura & Tsui, 2011).

Examples of criticism in Itakura and Tsui's study (2011)

(10) *Apology*: '*moshi, matohazurena giron o shite itara, oyurushi itadakitai*'

[If my critique is off point, I would like to ask for your forgiveness.]

(11) *Self-denigration*: '*hissha ni wa toutei oyobanai ga, bunsho o shiryoo toshite toriageta koto no aru hyoosha ni wa, masani arigatai issho de atta*'

[It was certainly a precious book for the reviewer, who has previously used similar types of documents as a database for this research, although I cannot come within miles of the author.]

(12) *Rhetorical question*: '... *to iu kangaekata wa kyakkansei・ronrisei ni kakete iru no dewa nai ka*'

[Doesn't this way of thinking ... lack objectivity and logic?]

(Itakura & Tsui, 2011: 1370-1373)

Previous studies of negative evaluations, such as criticism in academic book reviews have revealed that writing an academic book review involves

social interaction between book reviewers and authors/readers. Writers need to carefully use negative politeness while softening their criticism with mitigating devices. The ways in which writers use these linguistic devices differ according to language and academic genre. Therefore, in this study, Japanese and English criticism in sociolinguistic book reviews will be examined with a view to exploring differences in the characteristics of English and Japanese writing. Politeness strategies towards authors and readers will be analysed in terms of writing criticism in English and Japanese reviews.

3. Method

A total of 24 English and Japanese book reviews were collected as data for this study. The corpus consisted of 12 English book reviews from the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* from 2015 to 2016, and 12 Japanese book reviews from *The Japanese Journal of Language in Society* from 1998 to 2013. The publication dates of the journals in English and Japanese book reviews differed since some Japanese journals in applied linguistics do not always contain book reviews, and journals are generally published only once a year compared to five times a year for the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. Sociolinguistics was chosen as a field because it allowed a fair comparison between English and Japanese. The reviewers in English belong to universities in America or Europe, including the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the reviewers in Japanese are native Japanese speakers who work at universities in Japan. Furthermore, the reviewers in both journals are most likely linguists because of the nature of the journals.

In this study, criticism is defined as a negative evaluation of a book and its author. "Expressions of dissatisfaction or negative comments on the book are described by reviewers" (Hyland, 2000: 44). Itakura and Tsui (2011: 1367) define criticism in academic book reviews as instances where reviewers find particular problems and identify weaknesses in the book, which can be constituted as face-threatening. When writing criticism, writers sometimes use linguistic devices to mitigate their criticism and try to reduce the degree of a face-threatening act. Reviewers tend to use negative politeness strategies such as hedging and minimizing imposition of their remarks

(Johnson & Roen, 1992).

In the corpus used for this study, the English data consisted of 748 sentences and the Japanese data consisted of 1,141 sentences. For this study, the length of a sentence and number of words used in each book review depended on the conventions for book reviews, since the ways in which they expressed their summaries and evaluations varied. The basic sentence structures between English and Japanese are syntactically different, as English is a SVO language (Subject, Verb, Object) whereas Japanese is a SOV language (Subject, Object, Verb).

In the analysis of the following section, the frequency of criticism occurring in English and Japanese sociolinguistic book reviews will be compared. The types of criticism expressed with negative politeness will be also defined in the quantitative and qualitative data in order to examine the writing styles of English and Japanese academic book reviews, with a focus on the linguistic differences of mitigating devices in criticism. Finally, the ways in which criticism is used differently by reviewers in English and Japanese will be discussed together with linguistic politeness in order to show how reviewers use different conventions, as reflected in their writing styles.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Frequency of criticism in English and Japanese book reviews

The frequency with which reviewers expressed criticism in academic book reviews differed between English and Japanese. In the sociolinguistic journals selected for this study, reviewers in English used more expressions of criticism than reviewers in Japanese (see Table 1). In 748 English sentences, English speakers used 59 criticisms, whereas in 1,141 Japanese sentences, Japanese speakers used 53 criticisms. Reviewers in both languages used criticism moderately in their book reviews, consisting of less than 10% of their reviews.

Table 1. *Frequency of sentences of criticism in sociolinguistic book reviews*

	English	Japanese
Sentences of criticism and negative evaluation in the total number of sentences	7.9%	4.6%

4.2 Contrast form and praise-criticism strategy

Several strategies were observed in criticism, such as contrast forms and a praise-criticism strategy, linguistic mitigating devices including hedges and expressions of personal attribution, and creating common ground with readers. Such strategies were used in most criticisms in order to soften them. Book reviewers generally take negative politeness into consideration and offer humble criticism of the problems of a book.

On the other hand, reviewers sometimes employed both positive and negative politeness by using a contrast form or a praise-criticism strategy. Paying a compliment before stating criticism helps to soften their criticism. In a praise-criticism strategy, the opening move offers praise before stating a criticism. Both positive and negative evaluations may appear when providing criticism in order to maintain balance and mitigate the negativity within the evaluations. Hyland (2000) states that offering limited praise is a means of conveying criticism indirectly. In this study, English speakers used 19 praise-criticism strategies in a total of 59 criticisms (31.7%), while Japanese speakers used 11 praise-criticism strategies in a total of 53 criticisms (20.8%). Reviewers also sometimes used a contrast form with 'although', 'while', 'however', and 'but' in criticism sentences, which they did not necessarily use as praise. Approximately 29% of English criticisms were this type, compared to approximately 13% of Japanese criticisms.

The following examples show that reviewers first offer praise before giving their criticisms. In Example 1, after complimenting the authors and papers that have covered a large range of varieties and approaches in the analyses, the reviewer cites a negative point in the collection of papers, which lacks a paper that has traced the development of an institutionalised second-language variety of English in real time. In this claim in English, the reviewer uses a contrast construction of a sentence with 'even though'; nevertheless, he does not use any hedge in the critical part of this sentence stating 'one major omission'. In Example 2, after the Japanese reviewer initially compliments the book, he then gives a negative evaluation of the analyses of the book as having insufficient depth and stopping at a surface level. Also in this criticism, the Japanese reviewer dose not hedge on the part of negative evaluation. In both examples, reviewers show a positive

face to the authors before expressing their negative evaluations, and positive politeness devices are used to mitigate both claims and denials of claims (Myers, 1989: 7).

Example 1

'<u>Even though the eleven papers cover a large range of varieties and approaches</u>, there is one major omission: there is no paper that traces the development of an institutionalised second-language variety of English in real time'.

Example 2

'..., *<u>deeta ya senkookenkyuu e no mekubari ga ikitodoki, sugureta tenboo no sho o teikyoo shiteiru ippoo de,</u> koko no gengo koomoku no bunseki wa asai mono ni tomatte iru*'

[..., <u>while this book offers excellent prospects with sufficient data and previous studies</u>, the analyses of each linguistic item stop at a surface level.]

4.3 Hedging

The most common strategy for softening criticism was hedging in this study. Hedges are linguistic mitigating devices used in both spoken and written interaction, and they reflect a relationship between writers and readers (Hyland, 1994; Myers, 1989). For example, in Japanese spoken interaction, hedges such as *tabun* 'probably' and *chotto* 'a little, a bit' can be used when expressing negative comments or declining a request in order to soften a face-threatening act (Hotta & Horie, 2012). Hedges are often used in English academic writing, where they are understood by writers as negative politeness in the politeness strategy (Myers, 1989). Writers generally use hedges to state their claims with less commitment and a less expert stance in a field of an academic community, and also to reflect a positive relationship with the reader and the author (Hyland, 1994, 1998, 2000). As such, Myers (1989: 14) states that "Hedges are used to indicate degrees of doubt about the interpretation of results or theoretical possibility and to leave open the possibility that the writers' judgment could be wrong".

The category of English hedges in writing is diverse. English hedges in academic writing in previous studies have included adjectives and adverbials of probability such as 'probable', 'probably'; degree, quantity, and frequency such as 'almost'; attitude markers such as 'unfortunately'; epistemic verbs such as 'seem', 'believe', and 'assume'; modal auxiliary verbs such as 'would', 'might', 'may', and 'could' (Alcaraz-Ariza, 2002; Hyland, 1994, 2000; Itakura, 2013). Indirect expressions including if-clauses, question forms, and passive forms used for softening statements have been also categorised as English hedges (Hyland, 1994).

In this study both English and Japanese criticisms were written with hedges. A total of 130 hedges were observed in 59 English criticisms, while 83 hedges were observed in 53 Japanese criticisms. Reviewers in English offered more criticisms than reviewers in Japanese; thus they seemed to use more hedges in their criticism. These hedges consisted of modal auxiliary verbs such as 'would', 'could', 'may', and 'might'; lexical verbs such as 'seem', 'feel', and 'think' which sometimes include passive construction; adjectives such as 'difficult', 'unsure', 'possible', 'enough', and 'unfortunate'; adverbial phrases such as 'rather', 'unfortunately', 'in general', 'in terms of', and 'while'; lexical nouns such as 'assumption', 'impression', and 'case'; conditional constructions including if-clauses; and question forms including 'I wonder'.

In addition, reviewers in English tended to use multiple hedges in a single sentence in order to mitigate their criticism as much as possible. In English all criticism sentences used hedges and 98% of their criticisms were written with multiple hedges, whereas in Japanese approximately 56% of criticism sentences were written with multiple hedges. Approximately 44% of Japanese criticism sentences used only one hedge in a single sentence. This result seemed to suggest that most reviewers in English consider multiple hedging as compulsory while reviewers in Japanese do not.

A cross-cultural analysis of English and Japanese sociolinguistic book reviews revealed that reviewers in English and Japanese sometimes used different types of hedges in their criticism (see Figure 1). Reviewers in English tended to use adverbial and adjectival phrases, and modal auxiliary verbs, rather than conditional constructions and question forms. On the other hand, Japanese reviewers tended to use adverbial phrases, lexical

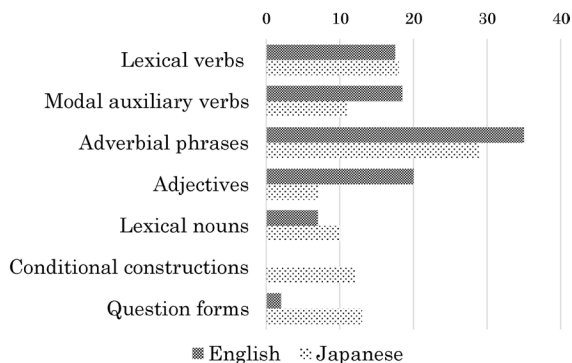verbs, question forms, and conditional constructions rather than adjectives.

Figure 1. *Hedges used in English and Japanese criticism* (%)

In the frequently occurring types of hedges, adverbial phrases were the most often used in both English and Japanese. In particular, they were often used to limit the time of criticism, such as 'in terms of' and 'occasionally'. Lexical verbs such as 'seem' and 'tend', and modal auxiliary verbs such as 'may' and 'could' also helped express criticism with a low degree of explicitness and forcefulness.

For instance, in Example 3 below, the reviewer uses the adverb 'occasionally' as a downtoner, suggesting a problem in the analysis with low frequency. In this criticism, the reviewer also uses the lexical verb 'seem' to avoid using a *be*-verb and to express her opinion less explicitly. The writer uses these hedges to indicate degrees of doubt about the interpretation of results and to leave open the possibility that the writers' judgment could be wrong (Myers, 1989: 14). In Example 4, the reviewer uses a modal auxiliary verb 'may', which helps reduce the degree of certainty in the author's claim in the preface regarding 'one criticism of the volume'. 'May' and 'might' are commonly used to indicate possibility (Swan, 1980). The author also restricts the field by saying 'in terms of current sociophonetic research'.

Example 3
'Occasionally, however, this indeterminacy of outcome is not foregrounded

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and 'enregisterment' <u>seems</u> to be either taken for granted or used to describe moments of agency at a much more individual level, rather than as the outcome of more collective/cumulative process'.

Example 4
'One criticism of the volume <u>may</u> be that <u>in terms of</u> current sociophonetic research, it is light on speech perception, focus on the word-level, nuanced considerations of the *social* side of sociophonetic variation, and the voices of cognitive scientists'.

As for specifying a time when giving negative evaluations with an adverbial phrase, in Example 5, the reviewer mentions that analysis of themes in the field of sociolinguistics poses some problems. In claiming this negative evaluation, he uses three hedges: an adverbial clause to limit time and condition, 'when'; double negative forms; and possibly a modal auxiliary verb, 'will'. Although the modal auxiliary verb 'will' is not clearly mentioned, it would be implied in this sentence with *miidasarenai* 'will not be found' since some problematic points would be revealed in a certain condition. Regarding the Japanese future tense, Ogihara (1999: 328) states that "at least morphologically, it does not have an overt marker on the verb that indicates future time. In Japanese, future-oriented interpretations are supplied by sentences in the simple present tense".

Example 5
'..., *honsho ga toriageta teema ni tsuite shakaigengogaku-teki ni apuroochi shiyoo to suru <u>baai</u>, honsho no tachiba ni mondaiten ga miidasare<u>nai</u> wake dewa<u>nai</u>*'
[..., <u>when</u> the themes in this book are examined in the field of sociolinguistics, it <u>will</u> <u>not</u> be found that there are <u>no</u> problematic points in this book.]

Reviewers in English also sometimes used adjectives as a downtoner to reduce the frequency of problems in criticism, such as 'some' and 'little'. These hedges are called attribute hedges, which are used as downtoners to

distinguish how far results approximate to an idealised state (Hyland, 1996: 10). In Example 6, the reviewer uses 'little' for indicating a negative meaning of criticism to mitigate and approximate the amount of evidence in the claim. When the reviewer suggests the amount of evidence, a lexical verb, 'appear' is also used to help protect the writer's involvement, and a modal auxiliary verb, 'would' is used to help mitigate the writer's claim.

Example 6
'...; however, there <u>appears</u> to be <u>little</u> evidence that <u>would</u> confirm such a move beyond nativization at the present time'.

A few differences in using linguistic devices for hedging were observed between English and Japanese book reviews in the results of the current study. Conditional constructions and question forms were more frequently used by Japanese reviewers than by reviewers in English. In this study, conditional constructions were not used in English book reviews at all. Hinkel (1997) states that hypothetical constructions are used for indirect solidarity in politeness when a writer makes a claim with which everybody might potentially agree. Hypothetical statements are used to suggest reviewers' evaluation and awareness (Itakura, 2013), and a conditional clause conveys a more desirable condition as counter-factual (Itakura & Tsui, 2011: 1372). For instance, in Example 7, the reviewer seems to feel dissatisfied with the book, adding the conditional construction of an if-clause with an attribute hedge (*tashoo no monotarinasa ga nokoru to sureba* 'if l remain a little dissatisfied with this book') rather than directly and explicitly stating her dissatisfaction. The reviewer expresses an expectation of wishing to know more about both the present situation and the future prospects of the field of media literacy in Japan.

Example 7
'*honsho o yomioete* <u>*tashoo*</u> *no monotarinasa ga nokoru to su<u>reba</u>, sore wa nihon no genjoo ya shoorai ni kansuru genkyuu ga nakatta koto kara kuru mono daroo*'
[<u>If</u> I remain <u>a little</u> dissatisfied with this book after finishing it, this

would be because the author did not say anything about the present situation and future prospects of Japan.]

Moreover, some reviewers raised questions instead of stating problems clearly when they doubted authors' judgements in books. In the results of this study, question forms were more frequently used by reviewers in Japanese than in English (see Figure 1). The purpose of question forms is not only to obtain information but also to engage with or express concern with a situation, and questioners might already know the answer (Athanasiadou, 1991). Furthermore, questions might be intended to show the importance of a particular argument and to emphasise the particular nature of a message (Athanasiadou, 1991). This is seen, in Example 8, in which the reviewer questions the author's definition of typical behaviour as less frequently occurring behaviour, and this seems to indicate the reviewer's objection. The reviewer might call attention to a particular argument while stating a disagreement. He might also try to involve readers and ask them to agree with him while creating a common ground with readers.

Example 8
'*sonna ni shoojiru koto no hikui kooi o tenkei to shite teigi shite yoi no daroo <u>ka</u>*'
[<u>Is it</u> OK that the less frequently occurring behaviour is defined as typical behaviour<u>?</u>]

4.4　Other mitigation strategies

While hedging was used frequently, other mitigation strategies were also observed in writing criticism. Reviewers sometimes expressed their thoughts and feelings as personal opinions. Presenting criticism as the reflection of a personal opinion helps convey a less threatening authorial voice whereby the reviewer reacts as an ordinary reader rather than an expert (Hyland, 2000). Furthermore, Myers (1992) states that personal statements are used to demonstrate writers' solidarity with readers. In the current study, reviewers used subject and possessive pronouns such as 'I' and 'my' and lexical verbs such as 'think' and 'feel' in order to express

personal attributions. Reviewers also sometimes used embedded sentences with introductory phrases like 'I feel' and 'I think'. In Japanese, some reviewers used personalized sentences using *kanjiru* 'feel' and *omou* 'think'. This type of embedded sentence makes a negative evaluation more personal and indirect, and it helps mitigate writers' opinions and criticisms of a book while reducing the degree of a face-threatening act to authors/readers from expert criticism by an authority.

In the result of this study, personal thoughts and feelings were more often expressed by reviewers in Japanese (20.8%) than English (15.3%). In English, the subject of a sentence cannot be omitted. However, in Japanese the subject can often be omitted with epistemic and other types of verbs when it is implicit in the context (Maynard, 1990). In the results of the current study, subjects were sometimes omitted in Japanese criticism. For example, in Example 9, the reviewer addresses the criticism that something is missing from the book by stating *kanjiru* '[I] feel'. Conveying the reviewer's feeling makes the comment personal and sounds less related to the reviewer's position as expert. The reviewer also uses another hedge in this sentence by adding an adverbial time-limiting clause, saying *honsho o kenkyuusho to shite mita toki* 'when this book is evaluated as a book of research'. Reviewers' claims are provided as their personal feelings, leaving readers free to choose whether or not they agree with the persuasive explanation (Myers, 1989).

> Example 9
> '*ippoo, honsho o kenkyuusho to shite mita toki, ika no yoona ten ni monotarinasa o kanjiru*'
> [On the other hand, when this book is evaluated as a book of research,
> [I] feel that the following points are missing.]

As an indirect approach to criticism, a few English and Japanese critiques were expressed in terms of problems in the current research and with suggestions for future research. Expectations of future developments in further studies were used to mitigate negative evaluations. Although this mitigation device was only found in Japanese book reviews in the study by

Itakura and Tsui (2011), this study found that reviewers in English used this form more often than reviewers in Japanese. For example, in example 10, the reviewer in English might have found the data of the present research insufficient and less systematic; accordingly, he suggests that a larger and more systematic scale of research is necessary to assess the direction of possible changes in post-apartheid South African English. The intensifier of the adverb 'clearly' emphasises the necessity of further research, and the reviewer suggests how authors could develop their studies in further research while pointing out problems of the present research.

> Example 10
> 'Clearly, <u>further research</u> on a larger and more systematic scale is needed to assess the direction of possible changes in post-apartheid South African English'.

In this study, book reviewers in English and Japanese used similar linguistic devices to soften their negative claims; however, there were some socio-cultural differences in the ways in which they soften their criticism in sociolinguistic book reviews. When giving criticism, reviewers in English and Japanese sometimes used different communicative mitigation strategies. Reviewers in English tended to use contrast forms including a praise-criticism strategy, and hedges including adverbial phrases, adjectives, lexical verbs and modal auxiliary verbs, while Japanese reviewers tended to use hedges including adverbial phrases, lexical verbs, conditional constructions, and question forms. Japanese reviewers mitigated their opinions through the use of more personal attributions, and expressed their personal thoughts and feelings; this rendered their negative evaluations more personal while the reviewers avoided sounding like experts.

Although Japanese reviewers also used hedges, they employed them less frequently and used fewer multiple types than reviewers in English. This might be not only because Japanese reviewers state less criticism than reviewers in English, but also because rhetorical conventions are different between the two languages. The results revealed that reviewers in English seemed to try to reduce the degree of forcefulness in expressions while using

frequent hedges. Reviewers in Japanese, on the other hand, seemed to choose indirect expressions by using strategies such as conditional constructions, question forms, and personal attributions, which rely on readers guessing the reviewers' real intentions.

These linguistic devices were related to linguistic politeness, since mitigation devices were used to reduce a degree of face-threatening acts, while expressing personal feelings in the comments left readers the option of either accepting or rejecting the reviewers' explanations. In this sense, negative politeness, which addresses hearers' need for freedom from action and imposition put forth by Brown and Levinson (1987), was used.

5. Conclusion

In academic book reviews, although reviewers need to analyse a book critically, they also have to reduce the degree of face-threatening acts towards book authors and readers, as writing a book review is in part an interaction between them and the authors/readers. Reviewers use several linguistic devices to mitigate their criticism in academic book reviews, and they also sometimes use balanced positive and negative evaluations to offer critical analyses.

In this study, both English and Japanese criticisms in sociolinguistic book reviews were examined in order to reveal cultural differences in writing criticism. The results revealed both similarities and differences in how criticism is written in English and in Japanese sociolinguistic book reviews. Reviewers in both languages used several linguistic mitigation devices and strategies in their criticism, such as contrast forms, a praise-criticism strategy, hedging, personal attributions, and stating needs for future research. These mitigation devices were generally used for negative politeness in linguistic politeness towards authors/readers.

Nevertheless, the differences in the amounts of mitigation strategies and devices used between English and Japanese suggested that reviewers in the two languages used different cultural conventions in writing criticism. Reviewers in English tended to use hedges including adverbial phrases and adjectives, lexical verbs, and modal auxiliary verbs, which seemed to soften definite expressions by adding these linguistic devices. Further, the

more they were added the less forceful the sentences were intended to be. In fact, most critical sentences in English used multiple hedges in a single sentence. Reviewers in English also used contrast forms and a praise-criticism strategy, which delivered both positive and negative politeness in a sentence. Before presenting a negative evaluation, reviewers praised authors to soften their criticism while showing a positive face.

On the other hand, although reviewers in Japanese used similar hedges to those of reviewers in English, they also used conditional constructions including if-clauses, question forms, and personal attributions such as expressing reviewers' thoughts and feelings more frequently in their criticism than reviewers in English. These expressions led readers to guess the real intentions of reviewers' negative claims, and to choose whether or not they accept them. While English reviewers tended to choose hedging to soften their claims, Japanese reviewers tended to express their claims more indirectly, which provides space for readers to guess reviewers' real intentions. In this sense, Hinkel (1997) states that Asian students, including Japanese students, used vague and indirect expressions in essay writing. In this study, the cultural notion of indirectness was observed in professional academia specialised in sociolinguistics.

Although cultural differences have been revealed, there are several limitations to this study that will have to be addressed in future research. Since book reviews are not frequently published in Japanese academic journals of applied linguistics, the amount of data used in this study was limited; consequently, a larger amount of data in Japanese will need to be analysed. Moreover, the style of writing might be different across genres. For example, self-denigration was not observed in the Japanese criticism in this study, although it was found in the study of Japanese linguistics by Itakura and Tsui (2009). Thus, a wider variety of academic fields will need to be investigated in order to observe strategies across different genres since there might be distinct popular writing styles in each field. Furthermore, the results of this study need to be used to address what non-native speakers should be more aware of in academic writing, since acknowledging socio-cultural differences of writing styles and politeness strategy between native and non-native speakers will be the first step for non-native speakers to

acquire writing skills in the target language.

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Appendix: List of book reviews

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