

CHAPTER 23.

CRITICAL ACTS IN PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH ARTICLE INTRODUCTIONS IN ENGLISH: A LOOK INTO THE WRITING FOR PUBLICATION PROCESS

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It is now well attested that academics worldwide are concerned—to varying degrees depending on their field—with getting the results of their research accepted for publication in high impact journals generally published in English.¹ Spanish academics are no exception, and having their papers published in indexed journals is key to their academic promotion and achieving institutional rewards (Moreno, 2010). In the last decades there has been an upsurge in scholarly writing, a steadily increasing number of publication sites, and English has become the predominant language for the dissemination of new academic knowledge.

This pressure to write and publish in English has generated a great deal of cross-cultural analyses (Connor, 2004) within English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and more specifically, within English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP). This research has been extremely prolific in the Spanish context, where text-based analyses have shown remarkable differences in the rhetorical structure and style of several academic genres written and read in the Spanish local context and in the English international context. More specifically, research has focused on the contrastive analysis of rhetorical and lexico-grammatical features in English and Spanish research article abstracts (e.g., Lorés-Sanz, 2006, 2009a; Martín Martín, 2003, 2005; Martín Martín & Burgess, 2004), book reviews (Lorés-Sanz 2009b; Moreno & Suárez, 2008a, 2008b, 2009) and research articles (e.g., Fagan & Martín Martín, 2004; Moreno, 2004; Mur-Dueñas, 2007, 2010; Salager Meyer et al., 2003; Sheldon, 2009).

Less research has focused on the analysis of L2 English academic texts written by (Spanish) scholars and the potential discursive difficulties that non-native scholars may encounter when seeking publication in English-medium in-

ternational journals. That is, less attention has been paid to the writing process, especially by L2 academics, in the course of knowledge production, in general, and in article drafting and publication in particular. A notable exception is the work by Lillis & Curry (2006, 2010) on the publishing practices of 50 scholars in education and psychology across four non-Anglophone contexts: Slovakia, Hungary, Spain and Portugal.

This chapter aims to analyse evaluation—defined by Hunston and Thompson (2000) as the expression of writers’ attitudes or stance, their viewpoints or feelings towards particular entities—in one of the sections of the RA where both native and, especially non-native, scholars state they have more difficulty in writing, namely, the introduction. The choice of this particular pragmatic function of language is highly relevant firstly because evaluation, which entails judging relevant entities such as one’s research and findings and the research and findings of other scholars, is considered essential in order to “market” the academics’ research. Such evaluation can contribute to persuading “gatekeepers,” first, and readers, later, of the validity of the research, and can therefore affect the chances of having an article published and read. In addition, evaluation, and more specifically, academic conflict and criticism have been shown to be subject to intercultural variation (Lorés-Sanz, 2009a; Moreno & Suárez, 2008a, 2008b; Salager-Meyer et al., 2003), which may imply that scholars from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may be used to employing different academic conventions when expressing their attitude towards their own and other colleagues’ research.

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: (1) to explore how positive and negative evaluation is framed in the introductions of published papers in three highly prestigious journals in the field of finance, and (2) to unveil the potential difficulties a group of Spanish informants may have in framing their research within these conventions and the possible effect this may have on decisions about their manuscripts. As a result, the findings obtained from the analysis of evaluation in the introductory sections of the manuscripts submitted for publication drafted by a team of Spanish finance scholars will be compared to the results obtained from the analysis of a corpus consisting of successful RA introductions published in the journals where the Spanish academics aim to have their research published.

CORPUS AND METHOD

The corpus consists of 21 RA introductions (28,778 words) published in three high impact journals in the field of finance: *Journal of Business Finance*

and Accounting, *JBFA*, (0.832 impact factor), *European Financial Management*, *EFM*, (0.892 impact factor) and *Journal of Banking and Finance*, *JBF* (1.908 impact factor). The choice of these particular journals was motivated by the informants' difficulties and their desire to have their research published on these sites. The articles were randomly chosen; in the case of the first and third journals the first and fifth articles in the three last issues and the first article in the fourth last issue at the time of compiling the corpus were retrieved; in the case of the second journal all the articles in the single free access issue were retrieved. The most relevant details of the corpus are summarised in Table 1.

Two of the Spanish scholars' manuscripts, which had been submitted to these journals, were selected for analysis. The first manuscript was submitted to and rejected by *JBFA*, then submitted to and rejected by *EFM*, and subsequently submitted to and rejected by *JBF*. Although the manuscript was rejected by two journals with a lower impact factor, the authors believed it merited publication in one of the most important journals in their field and decided to scale jump (Lillis & Curry, 2010). However, they were not successful and, after receiving a third rejection report from a high impact factor journal, they decided to address a much lower ranking journal as the fourth possible site of publication for their study. The second manuscript was submitted to *JBF* and received a major revision report. The authors revised the manuscript in line with the suggestions of the referee and it was finally accepted for publication.

For the analysis I will draw upon two important methodological proposals. The first one is that of the Text History (Lillis & Curry 2006, 2010), defined as "a key unit of data collection and analysis for exploring the trajectories of texts toward publication, including the impact of literacy brokers"² (2006, p. 7). Thus, two Text Histories (THs) are analysed in depth in this chapter. In order

Table 1. Description of the corpus of published material

	Journal of Business Finance & Accounting (JBFA)	European Financial Management (EFM)	Journal of Banking & Finance (JBF)
2009 impact factor	0.832	0.892	1.908
Ranking position	28th	27th	6th
No. of introductions	7	7	7
Average length	1,417	1,302	1,391
Total No. of words	9,921	9,116	9,741

to build those THs I have collected documents and information surrounding the abovementioned manuscripts, which are summarised in Table 2.

Second, the analysis of evaluation is based on the concept of “critical act” proposed by Moreno and Suárez (2008a, 2008b), which they define as “positive or negative remarks on a given aspect or sub-aspect of the book under review in relation to a criterion of evaluation with a higher or lower degree of generality” (2008b, p. 18). The concept has only been applied to the analysis of critical attitude in book reviews. It is considered, nevertheless, valid as a starting point for the analysis of evaluation in other academic texts, or sub-texts, as in this case. The critical act is a functional, not a grammatical unit, and, therefore, several critical acts may appear in the same sentence. Likewise, a critical act may span several clauses or sentences. This functional analysis requires a manual analysis of the texts, as identifying critical acts can only be achieved through careful reading.

Table 2. Description of the Spanish academics’ text histories

Text History 1	Manuscript 1a (JBFA) Rejection report 1a (JBFA) Manuscript 1b (EFM) Rejection report 1b (EFM) Manuscript 1c (JBF) Rejection report 1c (JBF) Author’s email to editor + editor’s response (JBF) Manuscript 1d (a low impact factor journal) Notes on discussions
Text History 2	Manuscript 2a (JBF) Proofread manuscript 2a Editor’s decision letter + Major revision report 2a (JBF) Manuscript 2b (JBF) Author’s response to report 2a Editor’s decision letter + Reviewer’s response 2b (JBF) Manuscript 2c (JBF) Author’s response to report 2b Editor’s decision letter Publication of paper Notes on discussions

Both the published RA introductions in the corpus and the introductions of the Spanish scholars' manuscripts were carefully examined in search of positive and negative critical acts. These critical acts were analysed in terms of: 1) value—i.e., positive or negative attitudes being expressed; 2) target—i.e., the scholars' own research, the critical act therefore being self-referential, or previous research by other scholars; 3) (im)personality (Fagan & Martín Martín, 2004)—i.e., whether the target of the negative evaluation is made explicit (Example 1), or whether it is addressed to the disciplinary community as a whole (Examples 2), impersonality can also be achieved by reporting criticism made by others (Example 3), 4) directness (Fagan & Martín Martín, 2004)—i.e., whether the evaluation is hedged (indirect) (Example 4) or bold-on-record (direct) (Example 5), and 5) writer mediation (Fagan & Martín Martín, 2004)—i.e., whether the evaluative act is phrased in personal terms through first person pronouns or adjectives.

(1) Koski (1996) uses a location metric ... However, she does not distinguish the trading activities of different types of investors... (-). Koski and Scruggs (1998), using the TORQ database, distinguish buy and sell trades for various types of investors. However, they cover only 70 ex-dividend observations ... (-). (JBFA-2)

(2) Although specification errors can potentially have significant effects on tests of market misreaction (e.g., Heynen et al., 1994), the existing literature has not addressed the issue of how model misspecification may lead to conflicting findings on market misreaction (-). (JBF-4)

Most prior research explores the issues of multiple directorships and M&As separately (-). (JBF-5)

(3) However, a number of other papers cast doubt on (-) the interpretation that the diversification discount reflects value destruction (JBF-3)

(4) My large sample study of trade directions and trader identities *potentially* furthers our understanding of the ex-day pricing of dividends and investor trading behavior. (+) (JBFA-2)

(5) Our analysis is most closely related to that of Coval et

al.(2009) who show that it is possible to exploit investors who rely on default probability based ratings for pricing securities, by selling bonds whose default losses occur in high marginal utility states. However, their theory has no explicit role for debt tranching (-) as ours does (+). (JBF-7)

Finally, a note was also made regarding the particular rhetorical function of the negative critical acts in the introductions: identifying a gap in the literature or signalling flaws in past research, and of the positive critical acts: specifying the contribution of the scholars' research, highlighting the centrality and/or novelty of the topic of their research, justifying their research in the light of previous work and emphasising the motivation of their own research by establishing links with past literature.

The extent of inclusion of critical acts and their particular characteristics in the published RA introductions will be compared with the encoding of evaluation through critical acts in the manuscripts of the Spanish scholars. Such comparison will allow us to determine the extent to which the Spanish L2 scholars match or differ from this rhetorical convention as featured in successfully published RAs and to gain an insight into the possible role of critical acts in the writing for publication process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL ACTS IN PUBLISHED RA INTRODUCTION

As shown in Table 3, a total of 175 critical acts, i.e., attitudinal comments on their own research or on other academics' research, were found in the corpus of published RA introductions. Critical acts were further analysed in terms of value, target and function, (im)personality, directness and writer-mediation.

Positive critical acts are far more common than negative critical acts in the RA introductions in the three publications. More than 90% of positive critical acts are self-referential, whereas none of the negative critical acts refer to the author's own research. Negative evaluation tends to be coded through impersonal critical acts (65%), that is, criticism is aimed at the community as a whole, rather than through personal ones (35%), in which criticism is aimed at the work of particular academics. It can be concluded from these results that it is more necessary to promote one's own research than to criticise previous research. That is, according to Swales' (1990, 2004) CARS (Create

a Research Space) model, more emphasis is to be discursively placed on occupying the niche than on creating it. Especially important for scholars when marketing their own research in the introduction of their RAs is first, to be explicit about the particular contribution made by the research presented, as the following rather extreme example illustrates:

(6) Our study makes a number of important contributions to the existing literature (+). First, while controlling for the home bias phenomenon we examine the role ... (+). Second, unlike previous studies on international portfolio allocations (-), we control for market microstructure effects by ... (+). Existing research ignores the role of ... (-). In this study, instead of using a bilateral effective exchange rate, we use ... which is a much better measure of exchange rate risk. (+)
(JFB2)

It is also important to emphasise the research's topic centrality (as illustrated by the first positive critical act in Example 7) and to highlight the motivation of the authors' research and its relation to already existing research (as illustrated by the second positive critical act in Example 7):

(7) Our study is timely in the wake of recent financial accounting scandals (+) and subsequent concerns that discretion in GAAP can be a vehicle for management to opportunistically manage earnings to achieve certain targets (e.g., Dhaliwal et al., 2004). It also answers calls to develop a better understanding of the consequences for listed firms from countries that have adopted International Financial Accounting Standards (IFRS) issued by the International Accounting Standards Board (e.g., Gordon & Joos, 2004; Jubb, 2005).
(+) (JBFA1)

It is also important to note that it is the journal with the highest impact factor that accrues most critical acts, both positive and negative ones. It becomes apparent that academics need to fully master praise and criticism in the introduction of their RAs to convince "gatekeepers" of the validity of their research.

Evaluation tends to be expressed in a direct way; very few critical acts, whether positive or negative, have been hedged. Only a few positive critical acts (see Example 4 above) and a few negative ones (as in Example 8 below) include a hedging device:

Table 3. Corpus-based analysis of critical acts in published RA introductions

	JBFA	EFM	JBF	TOTAL
Positive critical acts	45	34	50	129
Negative critical acts	14	10	22	46
Total	59	44	72	175

(8) Much prior research has failed to provide conclusive evidence of earnings management using deferred tax accruals.(-). (JBF1)

Hedging, therefore, does not seem to be a salient rhetorical strategy in framing one’s own research in the light of previous literature.

Finally, lack of writer mediation characterises positive and negative critical acts regarding others’ research. Personal references are only included in self-referential positive critical acts. Almost 50% of the latter are expressed in a personal way through an inclusive we or our form.

(9) Instead, we contribute to the extant literature by proposing an ex ante benchmark portfolio approach to estimate ... (EFM6)

The novelty of our approach lies in the focus on insider trading decisions ahead of ... (+) as opposed to other studies that analyze earnings announcement only (-). This allows us to better explore insiders’ incentives and disincentives ... (+). (JBFA6)

Academics, therefore, highlight their role as researchers undertaking worthwhile, original, relevant studies.

ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL ACTS IN THE SPANISH ACADEMICS’ MANUSCRIPTS

The second step of the research was to compare the results from the analysis of the corpus of published introductions with the introductions of the papers that the Spanish informants had submitted for publication to the same sites.

Text History 1

This TH revolves around a manuscript which was submitted to and rejected firstly by JBFA, secondly by EFM, and finally by JBF (see Table 2). Therefore,

Table 4. Comparison of critical acts in published articles and informants' TH1 manuscript

	Positive critical acts (average per article)	Negative critical acts (average per article)
JBFA	6.4	2
EFM	4.8	1.4
JBF	7.1	3.1
manuscript 1a	11	2
manuscript 1b	13	2
manuscript 1c	13	2

three referee rejection reports were received from the three journals. These were analysed together with the extent of use of positive and negative critical acts made by the informants in the subsequent versions of their manuscript.

Two main criticisms were made by the JBFA referee report: the first concerned the literature review: “the paper needs to include more comprehensive literature review on ... if it is the topic the authors argue as one of the main contributions”, and the second one concerned their contribution “the authors need to do a better job at convincing their contribution to the readers,” which the referee stressed again at the end of the report “The authors also need to better convince the readers with what they think the main contribution of the paper is.” Similar comments were included in the EFM referee’s report: “I have several concerns about the motivation, method, and contribution of the paper,” “the authors fail to go deep enough to motivate their analysis.” In the third report from JBF the referee was more straightforward by stating that “the paper makes only a minor contribution to the literature. ... I doubt that considering ... provides us with deep insights.”

Having read these criticisms and knowing from previous intercultural analyses (Spanish-English) that Spanish academics do not as frequently follow the CARS model (Swales 1990, 2004) in the introduction when drafting their RAs in Spanish or in English (Burgess 2002; Mur Dueñas 2010), especially regarding the creation and filling of a research space, it was expected that few critical acts would be found. However, that was not the case. As can be seen in Table 4, Spanish scholars have included even more positive critical acts than the corpus average.

All the positive critical acts in the Spanish manuscript but one are self-referential, fulfilling the function of “marketing” their own research. Some of these positive critical acts specifically tackle the issue of their contribution (Examples

10). Nevertheless, the JBFA referee, first, and then the EFM and JBF referees after two such acts had been added (Examples 11) still considered them to be lacking in detail or unconvincing.

(10) For this reason, this paper firstly investigates herding behaviour in the strategic style allocations of UK personal pension plans in the period 2000-2007. (+) (manuscript 1a, 1b and 1c)

We thus contribute to financial literature by means of our attempt to improve the traditional method of detecting herding behaviour. (+) (manuscript 1a, 1b and 1c)

Consequently, we add to the financial literature, as we study herding phenomenon from different perspectives. (+)(manuscript 1a, 1b and 1c)

(11) By moving beyond examining herding at the individual security level, our study contributes to the growing “style investing” literature (see, e.g., Teo and Woo, 2004; Barberis et al., 2005 and Choi and Sias, 2009). (+) (manuscript 1b and 1c)

Previous studies within this growing literature on ... focus on ... whereas this paper pays attention to strategic style allocations and therefore includes the bond and cash style, which adds to the literature. (+) (manuscript 1b and 1c)

It follows from this that, contrary to expectations, Spanish scholars have at least partially complied with what seems to be customary in the RA introductions in these journals in terms of the inclusion of positive and negative critical acts and have even boosted the positive evaluation of their own research beyond the average.

Not only the value and target of the critical acts in the Spanish manuscripts but also their specific features (e.g., (in)directness, writer mediation and (im)personality) are similar to the findings in the published RA introductions. As in the case of the published RA introductions, critical acts tend to be direct in the manuscript introductions. Also in line with the critical acts in the corpus of published introductions, self-references are only included in positive critical

acts in the manuscripts (see Examples 9 and 10 above), whereas the writer's presence is avoided in negative critical acts, which also tend to be impersonal, that is, addressed to the whole community.

In general, then, the use of critical acts in the introductions of the Spanish academics' manuscripts is similar to that in the published RA introductions. That is, the Spanish scholars follow to a large extent the evaluative conventions prevailing in the published RAs to "market" their own research. Thus, the referees' rejection may be interpreted as based not on the academics' failure to comply with the conventions to rhetorically encode evaluation to promote their own research, but rather on the referees' belief that the scholars' research did not present a worthy enough contribution to deserve publication. This is only clearly stated in the third report.

Text History 2

The second TH concerns an article which the informants submitted to JBF. This journal has the highest impact factor (1.908) of the three journals constituting the corpus and it is a great challenge for any scholar—and especially for these Spanish informants—to have their research published on this site. They received a major revision report, which was very good news as the rejection rate is around 70% in this journal. They worked on their manuscript following the referee's suggestions and provided a long response to the reviewer's comments. The reviewer acknowledged their effort, asked for a few minor changes and finally recommended its publication, which was granted by the editor (see Table 2 for a summary of texts in this TH).

As in the TH1 manuscript, the total number of critical acts included by the Spanish academics in their manuscript was even higher than in any of the published articles and higher than the average (see Table 5).

Negative critical acts in the Spanish scholars' manuscript were introduced (and even accrued) in order to define the niche, by identifying gaps or flaws in

Table 5. Comparison of critical acts in published articles and informants' TH2 manuscript

	Positive critical acts (average per article)	Negative critical acts (average per article)
JBF	7.1	3.1
manuscript 2a ³	11	13
manuscript 2b	12	11

previous research. As in the case of published RA introductions, these negative attitudinal comments were not writer-mediated, that is, no self-references were included, and they were impersonal, that is, addressed to the whole community, rather than to the work of specific scholars:

(13) Most of the studies on window dressing examine its influence on return anomalies, but little attention has been paid to the existence and motivations of this institutional practice (-). The scarce literature on this topic (-) finds important limitations to test window dressing (-), which may bias the conclusions found in most of the literature (-). A major problem/concern is the unavailability of high-frequency data that would allow a direct comparison between disclosed and undisclosed information. (-) (manuscript 2a)

The first report they received contained two major concerns or criticisms, one related to the method applied and especially regarding the data provided in tables and their discussion, and a second one about the “missing clear motivation and positioning of the paper.” This report, unlike those in TH1, included a suggestion for improvement in relation to each of the points raised. In this particular case, the reviewer stated “I would suggest to more clearly explain and structure what the author(s) hypotheses is and how it relates to existing literature.” Although, as can be seen in Example 13 above, a gap was identified in the first version of the manuscript, the referee seemed to expect the authors to draw links between that presumed faulty research and their own, establishing stronger connections between the author’s research and past research in the field and making the differences, extensions or deviations from the latter explicit. This is something found in many of the published articles:

(14) Second, unlike previous studies on international portfolio allocations, we control for (+) ... (JBF2)

In contrast to previous studies, we do not make any specific assumptions about(+) (JBF4)

unlike existing studies, we further utilize alternative measures of(+) (JBF5)

A second feature that distinguishes our paper from most existing literature is that we explicitly model a(+) (JBF5)

In comparison to ... —which also incorporate estimation noise in measures of portfolio tail risk—this paper conducts the analysis in a more transparent framework(+) (JBF6)

In the Spanish authors' attempt to highlight what is different in their research and worth pursuing, as suggested by the referee, they included the following positive critical acts:

(15) *Our* approach is quite similar to that of Musto (1999) and Morey and O'Neal (2006), but we detect different window dressing patterns. (manuscript 2b)

(16) *We* also focus on the intensity of this cosmetic practice according to institutional features of our fund database, such as size, fees, age, portfolio duration and recent performance. These analyses expand on the potential factors initially tested by Musto (1999) and Morey and O'Neal (2006) (+) and offer results that help us to better understand the main factors driving this management behaviour (+). (manuscript 2b)

In line with the results from the corpus of published articles, these self-referential positive critical acts that highlighted the motivation of their research were writer-mediated.

The authors also responded to a comment made by the reviewer in relation to their insistence on the creation of a research gap "... seems a little bit exaggerated considering the amount of literature available." As a result, they deleted two negative critical acts which emphasized "the scarce literature on this topic" and "the practically non-existent background on this cosmetic practice in bond funds." Therefore, the revision Spanish authors undertook entailed some differences in the inclusion of critical acts, aimed at evaluating their own research and that of others.

Besides addressing the criticism by the reviewer in the new version of their manuscript, the Spanish authors clarified their revision regarding this negative comment (as well as to the rest of comments referring to the method and data) in their response to their report: "we explain more clearly what our paper adds to the literature, which analyses window dressing in this straightforward manner, that is, Our contributions are the following:" In the second report the reviewer seemed to be satisfied with the motivation and positioning of their paper in the literature, which had been the first and one of the most salient objections, as no further references were made in this respect.

FINAL REMARKS

The aim of this chapter has been to analyse evaluation through the concept of “critical acts” in the introductions of RAs published in three high impact journals in the field of finance and to compare the findings with those obtained from a parallel analysis of two introductions of RAs drafted by Spanish academics, submitted for publication to those top journals, and rejected, or recommended to undergo a major revision (although finally accepted). The encoding of evaluation in the Spanish academics’ manuscripts has also been analysed in the light of the referee reports received. The ultimate purpose of this research into the writing and research publication process is to gain an insight into possible rhetorical factors potentially affecting the decisions made on submitted papers, and ultimately helping (non-native) academics to get their research published in English-medium international high impact journals. This is currently a pressing need, as academic promotion, credentials and prestige are based on the publication of research papers on these sites.

The results found indicate that published RA introductions feature a similar pattern of use of positive and negative critical acts across the three journals. Positive critical acts outnumber negative ones. It is, therefore, highly relevant to stress the author’s own contribution to the discipline, to justify it in the light of previous research, to stress its motivation and the originality of the topic their research is based upon. Positive critical acts are self-referential to a large extent and authors tend to express their own voice through first person pronouns and possessive adjectives. Negative critical acts only refer to previous research, frequently in an impersonal way through references to the whole community rather than indicating specific pieces of work, and the authors’ voice tends to be unveiled. Both positive and negative critical acts are most frequently unhedged.

The analysis of the Spanish academics’ manuscripts has revealed, contrary to expectations, a high number of critical acts. In the case of the unsuccessful TH1, although the referee’s comments in the first two reports indicated the scholars’ unconvincing reference to the contribution and motivation of their research, the results show that those functions were actually discursively addressed by means of positive critical acts. The criticism seemed to be addressed more to the contribution itself, rather than to the authors’ rhetorical encoding of it, as becomes clear in the third rejection report. Therefore, it is not enough to include positive critical acts to highlight the value of one’s research; “gate-keepers” need to judge that such positive attitudinal comments actually match the research reported in the paper.

In TH2 it was found that Spanish scholars included a great deal of negative critical acts, emphasising gaps or flaws in previous research so that an appropri-

ate niche was created for their research. However, such negative evaluation did not prompt the appropriate contextualization of their research, according to the referee. In this particular case, a recommendation or course of action accompanied the referee's criticism. Indeed, the academics in the second version of the manuscript established further links between their own research and previous literature through positive critical acts, and softened the creation of the niche by deleting two negative critical acts. They seem to have responded satisfactorily to this criticism, and also to further criticisms regarding their methods and some discussions of their data, which granted them publication in one of the most prestigious journals in the field.

It is of great importance that scholars correctly interpret referee comments in their reports. In the case of TH1 analysed in this chapter, Spanish scholars may have in some way underestimated the criticisms received by the reviewers, since despite them, they then attempted to submit their papers with minor rhetorical (or research) changes to a journal with a higher impact factor each time, which turned out not to be a good approach. On the other hand, the specific response in their manuscripts to all issues raised by the reviewer convinced "gatekeepers" of the value of their research in TH2. This task was facilitated by the reviewer as each concern was accompanied by a suggestion on how to deal with it. It seems that the reviewer was at least partially convinced of the merit of their research and therefore decided to help them in the process. No suggestions were offered in the rejection reports in TH1, so it seems that the (non) inclusion of recommendations on how to improve the manuscript may be a hint to better interpret the referee's more or less veiled criticisms. In any case, both the rejection and the major revision reports addressed the issue of evaluation of the Spanish scholars' research and its interpretation in the light of previous research, that is, as regards motivation and contribution. This indicates that it is necessary—though not sufficient—for scholars to discursively address these evaluative aspects in their papers. The Spanish academics were aware of this requirement, as shown by their inclusion of numerous critical acts and as confirmed in discussions with them.

The analysis has focused on the introduction of the RAs, since, although critical acts may also be found elsewhere in the article, it is in this section that academics most clearly need to position their research in the field and to evaluate it so that it is convincingly "marketed." In fact, most of the referees' rhetorical concerns need to be addressed in this section of the article. Nonetheless, the contrastive analysis of critical acts could be expanded to include the whole article in order to determine possible areas of differences in terms of the realization of attitudinal comments between published RAs and (un)successful manuscripts.

The analysis of evaluation through “critical acts” in academic writing had previously only been applied to book reviews. It has shown to be an appropriate analytical tool in this analysis of RA introductions. Although many other issues may be at stake when deciding (not) to publish a manuscript, this research has highlighted the importance of the rhetorical interpersonal component of discourse to negotiate new academic knowledge within the research publication context. Further large scale analyses including a higher number of journals in this and other fields covering more authors and texts would help us learn more about the writing for publication process that academics undergo and, in particular, the problems faced, especially, by non-native scholars in getting their research accepted for publication. The results from the present and future, more extensive studies will allow us to offer scholars guidelines which will help them attain their goal of publishing their research in international English-medium publications.

NOTES

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2. Literacy brokers encompass friends, academic colleagues, editors, translators, proofreaders, that is, any agents, besides the authors, who contribute to the shaping of their article (Lillis & Curry, 2010).
3. It is interesting to note that no changes in the inclusion of critical acts were found between the authors’ manuscript and its proofread version.

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