



Historical appraisal analysis: Evaluation of the book in sixteenth- century England

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The author defended her doctoral dissertation *Historical appraisal analysis: Evaluation of the book in sixteenth-century England* (Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, B 562) at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Turku, on 4 December 2021. The opponent at the public defense was Professor Claudia Claridge (Universität Augsburg), and the defense was chaired by Professor Matti Peikola (University of Turku). The following is an English translation of the introductory talk delivered in Finnish at the start of the viva.

1. Good books, good histories

What is a good book like? Does a good book arouse emotions, contain lessons, provide the reader with new experiences or new knowledge? Should a good book comfort the reader, help them to relax, or even inspire them to try some new hobby? And could reading be dangerous? Does reading fiction make one lazy or encourage immoral behavior? Can books contain secret knowledge – protected information whose distribution among the reading public would devalue a professional class? All these questions have been asked in relation to books and literature during their long history. These days, especially in Western Europe, attitudes related to books are almost uniformly positive. Censorship is rare, as are public discussions about protecting professional knowledge. However, the situation has not always been so. In my research period, in sixteenth-century England, the printed book was a new medium. Printing had arrived in England at the end of the fifteenth century. The reading public was growing rapidly, and at the end of the sixteenth century, approximately 300 titles were printed a year. The print runs were not stable, but one title could be produced, for example, in a thousand copies. The speed of production was increasing rapidly, and the people of the early modern era experienced a veritable flood of new information.

In research literature, printing is often compared to the internet, and the effects of the printing press to the effects of the internet. Both technological shifts significantly increased the speed with which information could be disseminated. Additionally, both the printing press and the internet contributed to the democratization of communication. Different actors found it cheaper and easier to spread their views, and it became more difficult for

gatekeepers, such as medical professionals, schools, people of power, or the newspapers, to curate information. Of course, the comparison should not be taken too far. The early modern book was still an expensive object and far from affordable to the everyman. It would be wrong to assume that printing gave all people access to the written word. Yet, it is worth noting that the media shift allowed for a simultaneous growth in the reading public and the variety of reading material, and that these developments were a source of worry to some, much like the spread of the internet was in the 2000s.

2. Evaluation, attitude, emotion in Early Modern English prefatory materials

In my PhD dissertation, I studied the attitudes related to books and literature in sixteenth-century England. I studied the linguistic expression of these attitudes and how the reader was influenced to adopt these views. I studied how, in this era of media shift, the production of books and literature was justified, and how the content of the book influenced the attitudes expressed. I analyzed the linguistic expression of attitude using the *Appraisal Framework* (AF), a discourse semantic tool developed by J.R. Martin and P.R.R. White (2005). Given that its application to historical materials has been quite rare (cf. Suhr 2011; Dossena 2010; Ruokkeinen 2020), I also mapped out the suitability of the framework for the study of historical language.

AF is a tool developed for the analysis of *evaluation*, i.e., expressions relating to feelings and opinions. The theory posits that by analyzing evaluation in text, we may describe not only the text itself, but also individual or societal attitudes towards the concepts described within it. Following AF, the analysis at the center of the research conducted in this dissertation began with two simple questions: is the expression of appraisal motivated by feeling or opinion? If the answer is ‘opinion’, does the opinion expressed target a human or an object? Evaluations with an emotional basis are called *affect*. If there is no apparent emotive basis for the expression, the proposition is classified either as *judgement*, targeting humans, or as *appreciation*, targeting objects and events. Given that my study focused on the book, most of the tokens analyzed in the study were those of appreciation, but the other two categories also contributed to the attitudes expressed.

The research material for my dissertation consists of a 70,000-word collection of 70 Early Modern English translator's prefaces and dedications. I opted to study the attitudes towards the book specifically in the prefaces produced by translators, due to the fact that translation played quite a large role in the literary culture of early modern England, and this is reflected in the prefatory matter of the work. Indeed, English literary culture was quite international. Latin's position as a *lingua franca* supported the spread of religious and medical literature and Greco-Roman drama from all over Europe, while chivalric romances and sailing manuals arrived from the Iberian Peninsula, and classics of history and geography from France and Italy. Translators produced prefaces to explain the relevance of the work to its new environment, to justify its existence, and explain its origins. As a direct result, the translator's prefaces contain a plethora of opinions and valuations related to books and literature and make for a fruitful material for the study thereof.

However, the production practices were not the only reason why prefaces were such an important part of early modern literary culture. Richard Linche showcases the true purpose in his preface to Vincenzo Cartati's *The fontaine of ancient fiction* (1599), which he wrote after finding out his translation was about to be printed.

But when I found that it was so far gone, and as it were irreuocably escaped from out my hands, and euen ready to be thrust out naked & clothesse into the world, I chose rather to father it, and re-entertaine such my wandring traoueller, and bestow some few lines in his behalfe vnto the reader, than that so bare a subiect should passe in his imperfections vnepistled, or not befriended with the authors name in such his priuatnesse and obscuritie.

Linche, Richard. 1599. 'To the reader'. In Vincenzo Cartati, *The fontaine of ancient fiction*.

In the extract, Linche describes the process by which he decided to write his preface. Linche tells the reader that he chose to provide a preface in order to take responsibility for the work. He describes the work through the

metaphor of nakedness, and compares prefacing to parenthood. Linche's text, which ended up wandering the world without a preface, was unclothed and hence without the support of its maker. To avoid obscurity and loss, the writer must provide the work a preface as a cover. The metaphor explicated the early modern views of prefacing: with the preface, a text producer took responsibility for their work.

Prefaces also had other, lesser functions. As noted previously, they could also be used to explain the motivations behind the text production, the processes thereof, and to justify the text's existence. Sometimes the text producer also wrote a *dedication*, a letter addressing a person and gifting the text or book to them in an attempt to facilitate a relationship. The dedicatee could be a previous patron, family member, or even a stranger of nobility and wealth. With the dedication, some of the responsibility of the text was directed at the patron, whose protection the textual item needed in order for the text to be considered a serious literary product.

The prefaces and dedications of the era are not only interesting because of the amount of evaluative discourse available in them, but also due to the fact that they reflect the tensions of literary and book production at the intersection of cultural and technological influences and shifts. Many of the prefaces studied followed the Greco-Roman models of prefacing, which was natural given that their writers had been trained to build their arguments following these models. Rhetorical guides instructed the speaker to begin constructing their argument using three themes: the speaker's character and expertise, the questioning of the opponent's character and expertise, and the introduction of the topic itself. These three themes are all apparent in the prefaces studied. However, the production context of the texts studied was socially and linguistically complex, which produced some issues when applying the model to Early Modern English prefacing. Firstly, the production of these texts involved a number of actors. For example, instead of simply establishing their own credibility, the translator had to also establish the credibility of the work's author. Usually, the author was established as an unquestionable authority. Establishing the translator's own credibility, on the other hand, was a tricky balancing act, as they had to position themselves in relation to the translated text, its publication method, and the patron. Additionally, the translator was to show humility, following a tradition

established in the ancient oratory rhetoric. In all these roles, the translator was at a disadvantage. The original author of the work was the authority; in comparison to them, the translator was but an unskilled copyist. Publishing the work in print and allowing its dissemination to the public was a rude and unmannered act, which had to be justified in the preface. Finally, the translator could use the preface to approach a highborn patron to request protection for their work and patronage for themselves. In this situation, too, the translator had to tread carefully so as not to overstep.

However, the translators studied here were all very skilled text producers. Despite all these difficulties, they found ways to present themselves in a positive light. They boasted personal connections to highborn nobles or skilled and respected professionals, compared themselves to historical figures, and found ways to highlight their skill and accomplishments. Indeed, it was quite common for translators to point out their skill outright. Due to the demands of the *modesty topos*, an ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition of positioning oneself modestly and ingratiating oneself to one's hearers, the translators did so through demurring statements or outright denials (Dunn 1994: 4; Janson 1964: 124–41). And yet, through these denials, their skill is mentioned and discussed, their tenacity as text producers highlighted, and their agency brought to the forefront. Indeed, undisguised and unrestrained positive self-evaluations of the translator are surprisingly common in relation to their tenacity.

And how was the book itself evaluated? My analysis shows that the early modern translator generally spoke of their work in a positive light. Indeed, the preface can be considered a promotional text of sorts, although it needs to be remembered that the promotion was not necessarily done to achieve the sale of the work, but rather to achieve a reader's uncritical or even favorable position towards the work at hand.

The value of the book was described either as internal or external. The internal value of the work was expressed by establishing its uniqueness. These simple statements of quality were left somewhat vague. However, the expressions stressing the external value of the work could be said to have some more specificity. Establishing the usefulness of the work, for example, was a popular strategy. The material contains half a dozen synonyms for the lexeme *useful* alone. The attitude could also be conveyed using metaphors.

So, the work was to be, first and foremost, of good quality generally, and to serve the needs of the reader, for example by fulfilling an existing need for information. However, usefulness could mean different things to different people. For example, to humanists, it was especially important to aid the readers in achieving self-improvement, for example, in medical issues. In navigational works meant for sailors and sea captains, the argument gained more nationalistic tendencies as the text was framed as useful to the English nation as a whole.

Interestingly, it was quite rare to see the book evaluated according to the emotive responses it aroused. Although the *pleasure* of reading was repeatedly mentioned in the texts studied, these expressions were in the future tense, and promised future or possible enjoyment of the reading of the text, rather than expressing quality by stating any emotive response that the text had already aroused within the writer. Furthermore, the promises of future emotive states were repetitive, formulaic, and rarely specified the exact emotional response. The sparsity of these appraisals is likely because the era of fiction reading was only just in its infancy, and utilitarian reading was still the norm. The genres of what we might call ‘fiction’ were mostly limited to chivalric romances and drama. Yet, it should not be overlooked that reading for pleasure was not an unknown concept: even factual and instructive texts may have been written for the *pleasure of the learned* and for the *profit of the unlearned*.

The book could also be evaluated negatively. This may seem contradictory to the aims and functions of the preface, and to the other evaluations discussed so far. However, it is necessary to remember the precarious financial and social situation in which the translator found themselves in, and separate between the discourses concerning those parts of the book which have been produced by the translator, and those which had been produced by the original author.

Negatively evaluative propositions were made concerning the products of the translator’s own labor (i.e., the *target text*, TT). The target text was criticized for its gracelessness, rudeness, and lack of elegance. The common nominator between many of these evaluations is the fact that they relate to the text’s form – rather than the text’s content, instrumental value, or inherent quality. The appraisals concerning the original, untranslated text

(i.e., the *source text*) expressed opposing views and were used to compare and contrast the translation and the original.

Finally, it should be noted that the manner in which the work is discussed is heavily dependent on the content of the work. For example, my study shows that the evaluations of drama and fiction were far more critical in tone than those of factual or instructive content.

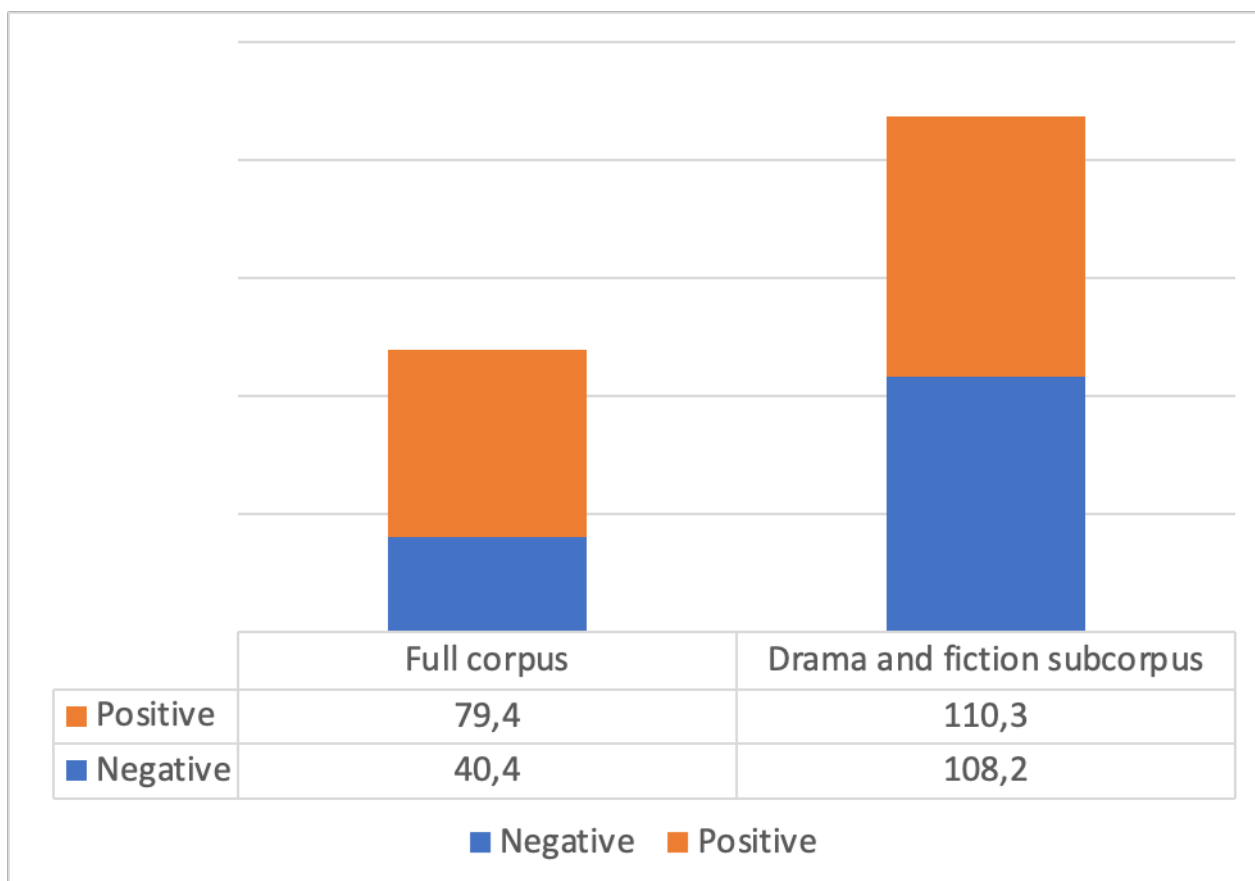


Figure 1. Comparison of positive and negative value judgements in CCP versus a sub-corpus of Drama and Fiction. Normalized by 10,000 words.

In Figure 1, we may see the relative frequency of explicitly positive and negative evaluations in the material. Each of the columns tells us the number of a certain type of tokens in ten thousand words. For example, in the full corpus, the book is negatively evaluated at a rate of 40.4 tokens of evaluation per 10,000 words. The same figure – negative evaluations of the book – in prefaces to drama and fiction appears at a rate of 108.2 per 10,000 words. The figure shows that works of drama and fiction are more frequently evaluated negatively than the rest of the texts discussed in the prefaces. To put this more plainly, works of drama and fiction were viewed more critically. One of the

main reasons for this more critical attitude was the previously mentioned demand for the speaker to act modestly.

3. Historical appraisal analysis

Finally, I wish to say a few words in relation to the Appraisal Framework (AF) in the study of historical texts and language forms. AF is the most comprehensive approach to evaluation research in linguistics. Crucially, it also accounts for indirect realizations of evaluative meaning. However, the AF model is fairly extensive, and may be somewhat cumbersome to work with. The multitude of semantic categorizations make its application time consuming. These issues are compounded if one studies historical language forms. The semantics of hundreds of individual vocabulary items need be checked in historical dictionaries. This leads to some serious questions of feasibility and reliability.

Additionally, when using AF, one needs to provide a detailed report on one's position in regard to the many methodological minutiae. For example, in my study, I focused only on tokens targeting the book in some way. The research material had a multitude of other tokens of evaluative meaning, which targeted other objects and entities. Had I chosen to study prefaces rather than the attitudes related to books, to describe them as evaluative spaces, I would have naturally included these tokens in my study. As it is, however, my material is not directly applicable for utilization in comparative Appraisal analyses of, say, historical advertisements or the development of the early modern preface as a promotional text. This is something that can be worked around, certainly. But the questions of comparability are an excellent example of the documentation necessary for producing Appraisal analyses.

4. Conclusion

Evaluation is everywhere. The study of evaluation makes it possible to identify not only personal opinions and attitudes, but the attitudes found acceptable in a language community, the scale of acceptable responses and views, and their changes over time. More appraisal research, from different textual contexts and from different time periods, would help us understand societal shifts. We might, for example, find out when text producers began

to abandon the overly modest attitude in relation to the patron, to see how quickly the explosion of printed titles in the 1570s and 1580s translated to the loss of confidence in the text producer's ability to secure patronage. We might ask, at what time did the prefaces start presenting the work in a uniformly positive light, if they ever did? Or we could ask if the evaluative strategies of the early prefaces are similar to present-day ads. Are prefaces advertisements?

In the future, I would be especially interested in seeing, and conducting, these types of studies, comparative or otherwise, and seeing how the media shift of the early modern era led to a different presentation and appreciation of books and literature. [N](#)

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