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THE EVOLVING DISCOURSE OF FILM REVIEWS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR APPROACHES

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This study illustrates how communicative strategies in amateur and professional film reviews shape readers' perceptions and preferences, contributing to the evolving landscape of film criticism in the digital age. Its purpose is to examine the communicative purposes of authors of the aforementioned types of reviews and their intended impact on readers through strategic and tactical language use. It employs a communicative and pragmatic approach to explore why readers increasingly prefer amateur film reviews over professional ones, focusing on the strategic and tactical differences between the two. Data for the research have been drawn from professional film reviews in *The Guardian* and amateur film reviews on Rotten Tomatoes, representing heterogeneous genres and scores. The analysis highlights significant differences in the use of communicative strategies and tactics in professional and amateur film reviews. Firstly, two-thirds of all identified strategies have been found in the amateur reviews. Secondly, both review types are characterised by the dominance of the informative communicative strategy, which underscores its alignment with the primary purpose of film reviews: to provide concise, objective information. Professional film reviews, however, tend to avoid author self-presentation tactics. Thirdly, the emotional and motivational communicative strategy, whose aim is to appeal to audience values and experiences, is more common in amateur reviews, thus fostering personal engagement and challenging conventional perspectives. Professional reviews, on the other

hand, prioritize objective analysis of technical and industry-specific aspects, distinguishing them from the emotionally driven focus of amateur critiques. Therefore, amateur reviews often feel more relatable and personal, which can enhance their credibility. In contrast, professional reviews tend to adopt a detached and structured tone, prioritizing the delivery of facts and critical assessment. While this approach supports objectivity, it might not resonate as strongly with certain audiences. These findings underline the evolving nature of film criticism and its dual role in catering to both subjective and objective reader expectations.

ЕВОЛЮЦІЯ ДИСКУРСУ КІНОРЕЦЕНЗІЙ: ПОРІВНЯЛЬНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ПРОФЕСІЙНИХ ТА АМАТОРСЬКИХ ПІДХОДІВ

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Ключові слова: *аматорська кінорецензія, комунікативна стратегія, комунікативна тактика, професійна кінорецензія, мовленнєвий хід.*

Дослідження демонструє, як комунікативні стратегії у професійних та аматорських кінорецензіях формують сприйняття та вподобання читачів, сприяючи еволюції кінокритики в епоху цифрових технологій. Мета цієї статті – визначити комунікативні цілі авторів вищезгаданих типів рецензій та їхній передбачуваний вплив на читачів через стратегічне та тактичне використання мови. Застосовуючи комунікативно-прагматичний підхід, щоб дослідити, чому читачі частіше надають перевагу аматорським кінооглядам, а не професійним рецензіям, ми встановили стратегічні й тактичні відмінності між ними. Дані для дослідження були взяті з професійних кінорецензій у “The Guardian” та аматорських кінорецензій на “Rotten Tomatoes”, беручи до уваги різноманітні жанри та оцінки. Аналіз показав значні відмінності у використанні комунікативних стратегій і тактик у професійних і аматорських кінорецензіях. По-перше, дві третини

всіх виявлених стратегій трапляються в аматорських кінорецензіях. По-друге, для обох типів рецензій властиве домінування інформативно-комунікативної стратегії, що підкреслює її узгодженість із основною метою кінорецензії – надати стисло, об’єктивну інформацію, однак автори професійних кінорецензій схильні уникати тактики авторської самопрезентації. По-третє, емоційно-мотиваційна комунікативна стратегія, метою якої є звернення до цінностей і досвіду аудиторії, більш поширена в аматорських кінорецензіях, таким чином сприяючи особистому залученню читачів та кидаючи виклик звичайним поглядам. Автори професійних рецензій навпаки надають перевагу об’єктивному аналізу технічних і галузевих аспектів фільмів, що відрізняє їх від емоційного наповнення аматорської критики. З огляду на це аматорські відгуки часто здаються більш близькими та персоналізованими, що може підвищити довіру до них. Професійні рецензії, як правило, характеризуються відстороненим тоном та фокусом на подачі фактів і критичній оцінці. Хоча такий підхід є більш об’єктивним, його вплив на читачів може нівелюватися. Отже, результати дослідження вказують на подвійну роль кінокритики у задоволенні як суб’єктивних, так і об’єктивних очікувань читачів.

The film review genre has undergone considerable changes since its inception and continues to evolve. As one of the changes, the field has gradually broadened and a new category of amateur reviews became quite as potential as the professional ones. Thus, the evolution of film criticism has largely been a story of moving from an elite realm of intellectual writing by experts to a democratic phenomenon where the distinctions between true expertise and ordinary viewers’ opinion are blurred. This shift has resulted in the loss of some traditional features of film reviews and the acquisition of new ones [Breuer, 2020].

The evolution of film criticism has progressed from film critics sharing their professional opinions through mass media such as magazines to moviegoers sharing their opinions through different modern technology platforms: *IMDb*; *Rotten Tomatoes*. The early stage of film criticism was provided by individuals who were responsible for analysis all aspects of films and explaining them to moviegoers. “It also highlights the fact that the media today relegate the role of a cultural journalist, critic or arbiter of taste to a group of experts, media professionals and celebrities of the cultural scene. In addition, digital technologies have challenged the professional logic of contemporary cultural journalism and criticism, allowing ordinary citizens or “amateurs” to participate in cultural debates and experiential evaluations across multiple media platforms” [Kristensen, 2012]. A question which is raised in this paper is whether the shift from professional to amateur reviews is stipulated by the difference in communicative strategies employed by both types of reviewers.

Nowadays, amateur movie review sites provide valuable insights into whether a movie is worth watching, as the text of the review is written in such a

way that it motivates not only to get acquainted with the rating of movies, but also to look at the movie that is offered to the attention of the reader from the point of view of the plot, characters, emotions, individual experience, and values. The information presented on the site includes a brief overview, information about the team that worked on the film, the actors, the general opinion of critics and feedback from other viewers. This information serves as a concise and informative message about the film content, incorporating elements of analysis and, what is more important for the modern audience, evaluation.

The communicative and pragmatic approach was chosen for this research to establish the reasons of shifting readers’ interest from professional to amateur reviews due to the communicative nature of film reviews. When studying the texts of film reviews and the overall transformation of readers’ interest from professional to amateur reviews, we cannot ignore the interaction between the author and their readers. For us, the assumption that it is the difference in communicative and pragmatic features that plays a decisive role in the difference in the perception of film reviews by modern audience is based on the understanding that by identifying communicative strategies, clarifying the meaning of the communicative process and exploring the communicative space – digital in this case – in relation to the communication environment we understand what hinders interaction or vice versa engages into it. The significance of considering the specific circumstances in which modern film review communication occurs was highlighted in AlMamoory and Abd’s work “as online digital communication is distinct and necessitates distinct linguistic methods. Participants must modify their techniques to suit the online situation, as in-person

communication may need to be more efficient in digital communication. The findings can guide the creation of linguistic techniques for online digital communication and enhance its efficacy in this particular setting” [AlMamoory, Abd, 2024].

The aim of the present paper is to establish the differences between professional and amateur film reviews in terms of communicative and pragmatic peculiarities which can explain the shift in their popularity. To fulfil this aim we set the following tasks: collate the communicative strategies used in professional and amateur film and ascertain their potential for fulfilling the communicative purpose of a modern film criticism form. The object of our research is the pragmatic features of professional and amateur film reviews. The subject of our research is the communicative strategies and tactics of professional and amateur film reviews.

Method. For the study of peculiarities of the film review genre, we analyzed the data collected from 20 equally-sized reviews of movies shot from 2017 to 2022 (Table 1). The reviews were heterogeneous with respect to their genres and scores from professional and amateur reviewers. As the source for our data, we have chosen *the Guardian* for professional and a popular platform *rottentomatoes.com* for amateur reviews.

The difficulties were in matching all the requirements for the reviews, which limited the material of our study. The requirements were as follows: 1) evaluation of both reviews with a difference of a maximum of 1 point; 2) professional and amateur reviews were the same in scope; 3) reviews should belong to more than one author in order to give a general idea about pragmatic peculiarities of the genre, not just the peculiarities of the author’s style.

Subsequently, language peculiarities of the reviews were then used to elicit further data. Thus, the next stage of the research consisted of an

attempt to determine the communicative purpose of the authors and the planned impact on the readers, embodied in the strategic and tactical creation of the text by application of specific language means. The evaluation of the data presented in this work leads to contextual and interpretive analysis results.

Results. This section summarizes the findings and contributions made in the process of reviews analysis within the framework of communicative pragmatics. One of the basic notions used in our research is ‘communicative strategy’. The concept of “communicative strategy” is interpreted by T.A. van Dijk as a cognitive process, the ultimate goal of which is the correction of the addressee’s world model [Dijk, 1983]. Different definitions and interpretations of communicative strategy can provide different perspectives for linguistic analysis, so we chose a definition that is more suitable for our research objectives. According to Ziomko, communicative strategy is defined as a pattern of speech behavior chosen by the recipient within the specific context of a communicative event. This behavior is chosen after considering the communicative situation and is directed towards achieving the ultimate goal of speech communication. Communicative tactics are correlated with local intention, which is implemented by a set of speech moves in accordance with the situational, social and cultural context. A speech move (step, turn, a communicative move) is a unit of a sequence of actions, with the help of which communication tactics are directly manifested and strategies – in general indirectly” [Ziomko, 2019, p. 10].

Communicative strategies are implemented using communicative tactics. “Communicative tactics are speech steps determined by the strategy, which together make it possible to achieve the main communicative goal. In natural communication, there are different ways to achieve a strategic goal (except for cases of strictly ritualized speech actions). Several

Table 1

Research Dataset: Film Titles, Genres, and Ratings

| Film Title/Year | Genre | Professional Review Rating | Amateur Review Rating |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| No Time to Die (2021) | Action | 3 (Wendy Ide) | 4 |
| Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness (2022) | Adventure | 2 (Wendy Ide) | 3 |
| Paddington 2 (2017) | Comedy / Adventure | 5 (Wendy Ide) | 5 |
| Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore (2022) | Fantasy / Adventure | 3 (Wendy Ide) | 3 |
| The Northman (2022) | Adventure | 3 (Mark Kermode) | 3.5 |
| CODA (2021) | Drama | (Simran Hans) | 4.5 |
| It (2017) | Horror | 4 (Mark Kermode) | 3 |
| Hidden Figures (2017) | Drama/History | 4.5 (Simran Hans) | 5 |
| Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings (2021) | Action / Adventure | 4 (Wendy Ide) | 4.5 |
| House of Gucci (2021) | Drama | 3 (Mark Kermode) | 4 |

tactics can be applied within one strategy” [Konratenko, 2018, p. 181].

The analysis of reviews at the communicative and pragmatic level made it possible to see what is common and unique to each type of film reviews. The evaluation of the data is used to summarize these features in order to determine which of them are important for the modern audience. For convenience, the data are included in Table 2.

The table presents the frequency of use of various communicative tactics in both types of reviews. There appears to be a considerable difference between the two types of reviews in terms of their communicative strategies and tactics. The first peculiarity is that amateur reviews account for roughly two-thirds of total cases of all attested strategies, with informative strategy having the largest share (30 attested cases out of 69). Evaluative, emotional and motivational strategies are represented by 13, 16, and 10 cases correspondingly. For professional reviews, informative communicative strategy accounts for 60%, followed by evaluative (12 cases) and a rather negligible part of cases for emotional and motivational strategies (3 and 2 cases).

Thus, as a common feature of both types of reviews we can set an informative and evaluative-influential strategies, though tactics of these strategies are to be analyzed for each type separately. Apart from this, amateur and professional reviews differ in the usage of emotional and influential and regulative and motivational strategies.

Discussion. Analysis of the data allows making certain generalizations about communicative and pragmatic features of reviews and their implementation in texts.

The informative communicative strategy in film reviews. This strategy is characterized by the largest number of tactics that represent it in both types of reviews and the highest general frequency of use. The frequency of this strategy can be explained by the fact that its primary goal is to provide the reader with the information about the film which coincides with the aim of the review itself. It provides complete, concise, and objective information about the film, which can help the reader make well-grounded decisions about whether to watch the film. Besides, the informative communicative strategy is easy to implement, making it a popular choice for film reviewers who want to provide useful and direct information about a film.

The use of author self-presentation techniques is the primary distinction between professional and amateur reviews for this strategy. Instead of focusing on their own personalities or experiences, professional film critics maintain a focus on the film. By avoiding self-presentation, reviewers can ensure that their evaluations of films are consistent and maintain a level of objectivity and distance. Amateur film critics, on the other hand, employ self-presentation tactics to explain their background or personal connection to the film, or to provide a more engaging and interesting perspective on films: *“I was hesitant to look forward to this one ... I didn't know much about the character,*

Table 2

Frequency of using communicative strategies and tactics in professional and amateur reviews

| Strategy | Tactics | Amateur reviews | Professional reviews | Total |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------|
| Informative Communicative Strategy | Tactics of immersion in the film | 8 | 10 | 18 |
| | Tactics of review object presentation | 9 | 10 | 19 |
| | Tactics of the author's self-presentation | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| | Tactics of appealing to the reader | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| Total | | 30 | 24 | 54 |
| Evaluative Communicative Strategy | Tactics of positive presentation | 10 | 8 | 18 |
| | Tactics of negative presentation | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Total | | 13 | 12 | 25 |
| Emotional Communicative Strategy | Tactics of creating an attractive image | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| | Tactics of appealing to the recipient's emotions | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| | Tactics of establishing emotional associations | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Total | | 16 | 3 | 19 |
| Motivational Communicative Strategy | Tactics of giving advice | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| | Tactics of expressing a request | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | Tactics of demands and orders | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | Prediction tactics | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Total | | 10 | 2 | 12 |
| Total | | 69 | 41 | 110 |

... This is what we all thought Iron Fist was going to be... But at certain moments the color choices used to highlight things really stands out and makes you appreciate it... Unfortunately, from a story telling perspective they gutted the character in Ironman 3 and left us all hanging” [Rotten Tomatoes].

There were attested common speech moves that are often used in professional and amateur film reviews to convey information and opinions about the film. For example, retelling the plot is a common speech move that provides a summary of the story and helps set the context for the review: “*The movie takes us into the world of 1930s Europe and Weimar Berlin; Grindelwald happens to be in prison and is planning to gain absolute control of the wizarding world when he gets out, by the accepted democratic route if that is convenient. Remind you of anyone?*” [The Guardian, 2017].

Citing primary sources, such as interviews with the filmmakers or articles about the production, can provide valuable background information, broaden the context and add insights into the film. Presenting factual information about the film, such as the budget, release date, and director, can help the reader understand the context, especially if these data contain peculiar drawbacks or assets of the film.

The evaluative communicative strategy in film reviews. Both types of reviews are very similar in applying this strategy. We can observe reviews being biased towards positivity as a result of avoiding negative presentation tactics out of fear of damaging their reputation or relationships with the film industry, studios, or producers or believing that positive presentation tactics are more effective in capturing the attention of readers and promoting a film to a wider audience. Approving and denying the shortcomings of the film are evaluative speech moves that allow the reviewer to provide their overall assessment of the film. Also, praising and complimenting the film were attested to express a positive opinion, while pointing out the similarities of the film can provide a more objective view of its strengths and weaknesses: “*There are some great scenes: I loved the Indiana Jones-ish sequence when Newt has to rescue his brother from a dank and horrible cave guarded by a grisly warder, played by the Austrian actor Peter Simonischek (the legendary Toni Erdmann from Maren Ade’s black comedy) and Newt and Theseus both have to do a silly hip-wiggling dance to mesmerise the horrible creatures that infest the place*” [The Guardian, 2017].

The emotional and motivational communicative strategies. Addressing audience values and experience is a speech move that allows the reviewer to challenge conventional views and expectations about the film, while an appeal to events and values can help the reviewer connect the film to broader cultural or historical contexts: “*The movie takes us*

into the world of 1930s Europe and Weimar Berlin; Grindelwald happens to be in prison and is planning to gain absolute control of the wizarding world when he gets out, by the accepted democratic route if that is convenient. Remind you of anyone?” [The Guardian, 2017]. A positive forecast for the film’s success can suggest that the reviewer believes the film will be well-received by audiences, while an appeal to someone else’s opinion can provide additional perspectives and insights: “*I have nothing but praise considering how much I enjoyed myself with this one, but I will say that a much more satisfying experience will come if you have seen the previous four Bond films. Now playing in theatres, absolutely check this one out.*” [Rotten Tomatoes].

Mockery and juxtaposition of objects can be used to provide a humorous or critical perspective on the film, allowing the reviewer to engage with the film on a more personal and creative level: “*It’s an omnium-gatherum of the company’s movies, series, and comics – an attempt to advertise these properties and prop them up as required viewing to understand the action. (Fear not: you can understand everything just fine even if you’ve missed “WandaVision” and “Inhumans.”) It’s also a blueprint for the building-out of subsequent productions involving these still-underdeveloped assets. It eliminates all definitive results from the dramas of Marvel franchise products – a mercantile cheat that already reared its head when Thanos’s murder spree at the end of “Avengers: Infinity War” proved reversible*” [The Guardian, 2022]. These speech moves can add depth and nuance to the review, helping the reader understand the film in a more comprehensive and meaningful way.

The tendencies of amateur reviews to focus more on personal opinions and experiences and professional ones to rely more on objective facts and analysis are reflected in the language used by each type of reviewer. Amateur reviewers often use first person personal pronouns, rhetoric questions, addresses, and informal vocabulary: “*But is it great, well, I guess we’ll have to get into it, shall we?... Very good movie and a really damn easy recommendation*” [rottentomatoes], and professional reviewers rely on more formal language and technical terms: “*The movie depicts the Browns’ Windsor Gardens neighborhood as a model of multiculturalism, but there’s nothing sanctimonious about it... Paddington himself is more of a melting-pot fellow than a pure multiculturalist*” [The Guardian, 2017].

Furthermore, although amateur reviews tend to concentrate on the individual enjoyment of the film and the emotional reaction it evokes, professional reviews frequently seek to offer a thorough analysis of the technical specifications of the film as well as its position within the broader framework of the cinema

industry. As we can observe, the main difference echoes the shift that the film industry previously experienced. From being saturated with information and analysis, which the audience had to do while watching a movie, industry and society moved to perceiving movies as pure entertainment. Amateur reviews, due to their pragmatic features, fit into the paradigm of the modern viewer: constant change of tactics, appeal to emotions, primarily positive ones, emphasis on viewing experience. Dry data about the cost of the film, sound engineers and cameramen cannot influence the desire to watch or not watch a certain film, but the journey through the world of impressions and emotions, described by the author, successfully does this.

Conclusions. The communicative and pragmatic features identified in reviews may be used to explain the loss of interest in professional reviews in modern society. As the analysis of professional and amateur reviews showed, the main difference between them in terms of communicative strategies applied lies in the realm of emotional and motivation strategies. For example, amateur reviews differ in their attempt to establish an emotional connection between the reader – the reviewer – the film by choosing communication tactics and speech moves that are different from professional reviews – the author self-presentation, sharing emotions, and personal experiences. This can make the review more engaging and intimate, thus increasing its trustworthiness. In contrast, professional reviews may be seen as impersonal and more formal, with a greater focus on conveying information and evaluating the film. While this can make the review more objective, it may also make it less appealing to some readers.

Sharing a common goal to create an idea of a film for the audience, both types of reviews have common features, such as the usage of an informative communicative strategy, the predominance of a positive presentation over a negative one, common communicative tactics, and certain language moves. Among the common important speech moves, we note the retelling of the plot, quoting, methods of characterization, references to primary sources, presentation of factual information about the film, approval, denial of the object's shortcomings, appeal to artistic traditions, an appeal to values, mockery, juxtaposition of objects.

To conclude, the focus of professional reviews on an informative communicative strategy with tactics of immersion in the film and presentation of the subject of the review overloads the text with details and facts about the film that are not very popular among the public. The cinematography itself is moving or has moved from the purpose of informing and aesthetic education to an entertainment and advertising function. And, therefore, the review genre gradually loses the position of material for analysis and infor-

mation and focuses on the implementation of evaluative and emotional impact. The further analysis of wider scope of material can give us detailed information about the shift in audience needs and preferences in term of communicative strategies and tactics that can improve communication between reviewers and readers.

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