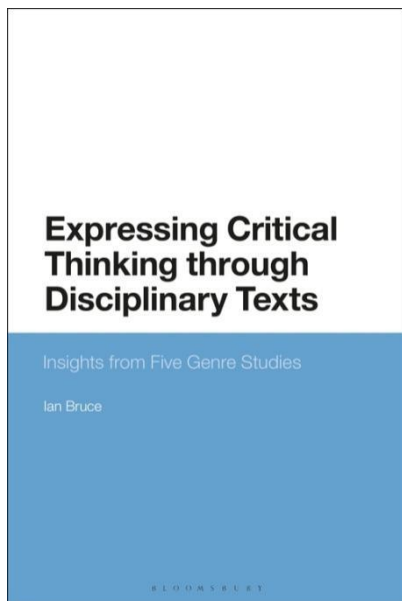


## BOOK REVIEW

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### A GUIDE TO DESCRIBING AND TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING (FOR ESP PRACTITIONERS)

**Ian Bruce.** EXPRESSING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH DISCIPLINARY TEXTS. INSIGHTS FROM FIVE GENRE STUDIES (2020), London: Bloomsbury Academic. 216 pp., ISBN: 978-1-3501-2789-0 (HBK); 978-1-3501-2790-6 (EPub).

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A central construct and educational goal in higher education, critical thinking arrests attention from teachers and researchers in applied linguistics and a range of other disciplines. As the meanings of critical thinking are continuously negotiated in different teaching and learning contexts, this monograph by Dr Ian Bruce provides university teachers and researchers with a timely handbook to better understand how the concept is operationalized in a range of written texts, and explore concrete teaching practices and resources to help students develop their critical thinking abilities. Featuring the author's years of scholarship on teaching university courses, supervising PhD students and researching genres, the book presents a model of critical thinking that accounts for how writers of university essays, PhD dissertations, research articles, corporate disclosure communication and journalistic commentary deploy various types of linguistic resources to develop arguments and enact criticality through these disciplinary texts. Teachers and researchers on critical thinking will find this book inspiring in guiding their pedagogical practices and future research activities in English for Specific Purposes.

In Chapter 1, the author first reviews the origins of critical thinking in Western scholarship and points out that, given the diverse intellectual contexts in which the concept *critical thinking* emerges, a range of definitions and teaching approaches can be found. After critically reviewing the two pedagogies of critical thinking in which the term is defined as “teachable skills” or “cognitive apprenticeship”, the

author then argues that expression of critical thinking has to be examined by focusing on organizational and linguistic features of disciplinary texts in the broad context of general English for Specific Purposes (e.g. Hyland, 2002).

Recognizing the need for a theoretical framework to investigate the expression of critical thinking through writing, in Chapter 2, the author reviews previous studies on critical thinking including those adopting corpus methods, and points out that most of the studies focused on the use of a single linguistic feature e.g. evaluation lexis (Channell, 2000), adverbial markers (Conrad & Biber, 2000) and reporting verbs (Charles, 2006). Given the need to study the expression of critical thinking in written texts more comprehensively considering multiple textual elements and their interrelationships, the author explores how a multiple-layer, genre-based approach could be taken to conduct the investigation. Following a brief review of three approaches to genre analysis, including the Sydney School approach influenced by Systemic Functional Linguistics, the ESP approach and North American approach, the author identifies two problems regarding these approaches that affect their construct validity: 1) a lack of comprehensiveness in operationalizing genre knowledge, and 2) the need to draw on categorization theory from cognitive science. He then proposes the social genre/cognitive genre model for researching genres based on his previously published research studies.

Chapters 3 to 7 focus on five different genres – university essay, PhD Discussion chapter, research article literature reviews, corporate disclosure communication, journalistic commentary – following the same organizational pattern: after a brief introduction, each chapter first provides an overview of the literature on the genre including the author's own studies; it then presents and discusses the findings of one study conducted by the author on the genre in detail; each chapter ends with the implications for the teaching of writing and for conceptualizing the expression of critical thinking in written texts.

While different sets of textual data are analyzed in the five studies presented in the book, the analytical approaches adopted follow a similar pattern. In the study detailed in Chapter 3, the author analyzes two sets of 15 university essays on sociology and English literature from the BAWE corpus and identified a total of 331 critical statements through which the student writers express their critical evaluation in relation to their essay topics. The author then applies the social genre/cognitive genre model to study how these statements communicate critical stances with linguistic resources such as interpropositional relations and metadiscourse devices. Chapter 4 features the study previously reported in Bruce (2018) that analyzes the Discussion chapters of six award-winning PhD dissertations in applied linguistics. In addition to identifying coherence relations and metadiscourse items used to express critical stances, the author also finds the recursive use of an organizing content schema described as "Point, Support, Evaluation". A similar analytical approach is adopted in the study discussed in Chapter 5, where two sets of literature review sections from research articles in applied linguistics and psychology are analyzed focusing on the use of content

schema, a specific metadiscourse device, i.e. attitude marker, and a particular interpropositional coherence relation, i.e. concession contraexpectation in expressing critical thinking. Concerning critical thinking in corporate disclosure communication, Chapter 6 analyzes 30 Fund Manager Commentaries focusing on the expression of critical thinking in terms of four areas of social genre knowledge of context, epistemology, content schema and writer stance. The same four areas are the focus of the fifth study presented in the book (Chapter 7). This study examines the commentary columns by the British journalist Polly Toynbee to investigate how the author expresses critical viewpoints on the neoliberal ideology of the government policies.

Coherence relations are important linguistic resources for expressing critical thinking as found in three of the five studies discussed in the book. One noticeable finding from the study on university essays is that the types of coherence relations employed in the two essay samples are similar as Grounds Conclusion, Reason Result and Concession Contraexpectations are the three most used relations in both samples. The findings lend support to an assertion made by Nesi and Gardner (2012) on the importance for student writers to be able to “comment on” theory and research when writing university essays in addition to providing descriptive accounts of the theoretical or research issues. The results also offer an alternative to Toulmin’s (2003) argument patterns for describing and teaching argumentative writing. In addition, the study highlights a set of cohesive devices used to signal relations between critical statements that could be taught explicitly in courses on academic writing and critical thinking. In the study on PhD Discussion chapters (Chapter 4), the author identifies the general move structure or content schema with a recursive pattern of “Point, Support, Evaluation”. Focusing on the critical statements in the Evaluation section, the study finds that Reason Result, Concession Contraexpectation and Grounds Conclusion are the three most frequently used coherence relations in the critical statements, which are the same top three relations found in the university essays. Coherence relations are also the key linguistic resources used to express critical thinking in the research article literature review as found in the study discussed in Chapter 5. In this chapter, the author first reports the finding that, in terms of Swales’s three-move structure, Move 1b (Establishing a research territory by introducing and reviewing items of previous research) and Move 2 (Establishing a niche by indicating a gap in the previous research, raising a question about it, or extending previous knowledge in some way) have been recursively used by the authors to express critical stances regarding the literature. In the context of the two moves, the author then identifies the Concession Contraexpectation interpropositional relation as the most prominent coherence relation often used to connect Move 1b and Move 2. Chapter 6 reports the study of Fund Manager Commentary but does not focus on coherence relations due to the lack of extended, general rhetorical development in the texts. Neither does the fifth genre study presented in Chapter 7 investigate the use of coherence relations; this

study focuses on the content schema and the genre models used by the British journalist Polly Toynbee in her commentary column in *The Guardian*.

Across the five studies, metadiscourse devices have been found to be often used by writers to express critical statements. In the study of university essays (Chapter 3), four types of such devices – hedging, attitude markers, boosters, and self-mention – are found in the critical statements of the two samples written by English and sociology students. In the English samples, the hedges and attitude markers account for 88.5% of all the instances, whereas attitude markers (74%) dominate the sociology sample. Over 50% of the hedging instances involve the use of modal structures and most of the attitude markers are adjectives. In Chapter 4, the study on PhD Discussion Chapters reveals that hedges and attitude markers are also the most frequently used metadiscourse devices in this genre for expressing critical thinking. Yet, in the study on research article literature review (Chapter 5), the author focuses on the use of attitude markers when analyzing the linguistic features for critical thinking and reports in relation to the use of concession contraexpectation interpropositional relation as well as the Swalesian move structure. While attitude markers are also the principal metadiscourse devices used for critical thinking in the Fund Manager Commentaries (Chapter 6), the other device highlighted in this chapter is self-mention; the use of both devices is discussed in the context of the move structure of the genre. In the study on journalistic commentary, the author discusses two types of linguistic devices for expressing writer stance including metaphor and attitude markers. Since the study analyzes the writing of one author Polly Toynbee, no quantitative information is reported about the use of attitude markers. Overall, the findings of the five studies reveal variation in the use of metadiscourse devices among the different genres and highlight the importance of developing awareness of such linguistic devices among novice writers.

As a researcher in English for Specific Purposes, I find Dr Ian Bruce's book admirable and inspiring as he illustrates how to conduct research on critical thinking through developing a set of analytical approaches that can be applied to a range of genres. Novice researchers in applied linguistics should learn from the author's success in publishing a series of research articles in leading international journals that culminates in this book and attempt to develop their own research methods that can be adapted to analyze textual data of various genres. As a university teacher committed to cultivating critical thinking among my students, I also benefit enormously from this book that provides a detailed account of a range of linguistic resources that students may use to express critical thinking.

Nevertheless, this book also reminds us of the need to explore new analytical approaches in English for Specific Purposes and to focus more on the contents and meaning-making when teaching critical thinking at university level. As pointed out by the author, most of the studies reported in this book rely on manually analyzing a small set of data; as a result, it is not possible to make generalized claims about the research issues based on the findings. With the advent of natural language

processing technologies, manually labelled textual data could be used to train machine learning algorithms that can then automatically analyze more articles in large scales (e.g. Cotos et al., 2015). As I argue in Wang (2017), researchers in applied linguistics can benefit tremendously from partnering with computational linguists with expertise in natural language processing rather than relying on off-the-shelf corpus tools. The needs to collaborate with experts from other fields are also underscored by the fact that students cannot learn critical thinking by focusing on linguistic resources alone. Even when the students become aware of coherence devices and metadiscourse items that are useful for their writing, at the end of the day, they still have to figure out how to solve problems in their respective fields and articulate their arguments in the specialized language. Critical thinking at the university level has to be taught in the disciplinary contexts through collaboration between language teachers and disciplinary experts that focus more on the contents and meaning-making in academic writing.

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