A corpus-pragmatics approach to evaluation in professor reviews

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This study takes a corpus pragmatics approach to investigate the use of evaluative language in professor reviews, focusing on how review writers express evaluation through recurrent four-word sequences and the pragmatic functions of these sequences in positive and negative reviews on the website, RateMyProfessors.com. Based on an analysis of a 2.9-million-word corpus of free text comments, the findings indicate that positive reviews used more 4-grams, and more varied types, than negative ones. The 4-word sequences were found to carry out four pragmatic functions: attitudinal evaluation, reader engagement, referential expression, and discourse organization. While a similar distribution of the main functional categories was observed among the top 100 4-grams in both review types, with evaluative clusters being most predominant, distinctive intra-genre variations were found in the ways review writers employed different functional subcategories. For example, positive reviews relied heavily on hedged suggestion 4-grams to engage readers, whereas negative reviews used directive 4-grams for the same purpose. These findings suggest the important role of multi-word sequences in the understanding of evaluative resources in professor reviews of different valence types.

Keywords: evaluative language, multi-word sequences, corpus pragmatics, online professor reviews

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