

Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Professional and Non-professional Online Book Reviews

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<p>Tutkielmassani analysoin kirja-arvosteluita ja niissä esiintyvää arviointia. Tarkoituksena on näyttää, mistä osista internetissä julkaistavat kirja-arvostelut koostuvat eli minkälaiset piirteet ovat tyypillisiä kirja-arvosteluista koostuvalle genrelle sekä ammattikriitikoiden että harrastelijoiden keskuudessa. Tämän lisäksi vertailen ammattikriitikoiden ja harrastelijakriitikoiden kielen käyttöä. Tutkimuksen teoria perustuu genreanalyysiin, erityisesti Paltridgen (1995) esittämään analyysimalliin, ja kielessä esiintyvän evaluaation analyysi keskittyy kirja-arvosteluissa käytettävään vertailuun, subjektiivisuuteen sekä kirjoja arvottaviin ilmaisuihin (Thompson & Hunston: 2000).</p> <p>Tutkimuksen materiaali koostuu ammattikriitikoiden ja harrastelijakriitikoiden kirja-arvosteluista. Ammattikriitikoiden kirja-arvostelut kerättiin kahden sanomalehden <i>The New York Timesin</i> ja <i>The Guardianin</i> verkkosivuilta, kun taas <i>Goodreads</i> ja <i>LibraryThing</i> toimivat harrastelija kirja-arvosteluiden lähteinä. Yhteensä materiaali sisältää kaksitoista ammattikriitikoiden ja 48 harrastelijoiden kirja-arvostelua. Harrastelijoiden arvosteluja on käytettävässä materiaalissa enemmän, koska niiden välillä on enemmän eroja ja ne ovat lyhyempiä verrattuna ammattikriitikoiden kirja-arvosteluihin.</p> <p>Analyysin perusteella kirja-arvostelut muodostuvat kahdesta tärkeästä osasta. Ne sisältävät kirjaa kuvailevan osan, johon sisältyy esimerkiksi juonen ja kirjailijan esittely, ja kirjaa arvioivan osan, johon kuuluu esimerkiksi kirjoitustyylin tai hahmojen arvostelua. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat myös, että ammattikriitikoiden ja harrastelija-arvostelujen väliltä löytyy niitä erottavia piirteitä. Osa harrastelijoiden kirja-arvosteluista ei sisällä kirjaa kuvailevia osia, vaan ne koostuvat ainoastaan kirjaa arvioivista osista. Ammattikriitikoiden kirja-arvosteluissa taas on enemmän kirjailijoita koskevaa informaatiota ja muutenkin enemmän kirjojen sisältöihin liittyvää tietoa. Ammattikriitikoiden arvosteluista löytyy myös enemmän vertailevaa kieltä harrastelijoihin verrattuna. Kirjojen positiivisia ja negatiivisia piirteitä tuodaan esiin esimerkiksi vertaamalla niitä toisiinsa teoksiin. Ammatti-arvostelijoihin verrattuna, harrastelijat puolestaan ovat subjektiivisempia kirjoja arvioidessaan. He käyttivät esimerkiksi enemmän <i>minä</i>-pronominia kertoessaan, mitä he tunsivat kirjaa lukiessaan ja mitä he pitivät kirjasta.</p>			
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1. Introduction

Present-day online sites have become places to search for reviews and to write them for others to read. Traditionally, reviewers have been characterised either as professionals or amateurs (Pool, 2017: 36), and this division can still be seen. Websites like *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing*, which both are platforms dedicated to books and discussions about books, are popular among non-professional reviewers. There they can share their opinions and read what others have thought of a particular book. In this study, the language of online book reviews is examined by comparing reviews written by professional critics and non-professionals. A previous study on movie reviews has shown that differences in the language used in reviews between these two groups of critics can be found (de Jong, 2013) but close linguistic analysis of online book reviews has not been conducted. The fact that differences are present is not very surprising as the reviews are written by people with different backgrounds and the reviews are published on varying online sites. I was interested to see how these texts have been constructed and how they achieve their function as all reviews have essentially the same function whether they are written by a critic or a consumer on a website.

By analysing book reviews, I examined how the professional and the non-professional critics evaluate books and have an effect on a possible purchase and a reading decision. A study of movie reviews has shown that reviews can have influence on how successful the movie is (Niraj & Singh, 2015), which suggests that book reviews can also have impact on the success of the book. The books benefit from attention, which they get when there is discussion about them whether it is on newspaper sites or in consumer reviews. This, in turn, implies the importance of both professional and non-professional reviews in decision making. Reviews have been studied to some extent but “the analysis of the review genre is relatively new to genre analysis” (de Jong, 2013: 81). In this study, I will answer the following questions:

1. How are professional and non-professional book reviews linguistically constructed?
2. What kind of evaluative differences are present in the language of professional and non-professional book reviews?

In the analysis of the book reviews, I used a genre approach adapting features from a framework introduced by Paltridge, which incorporates notions from “both social and cognitive aspects of language comprehension and production” (1995: 394). In order to answer my second question about the use of evaluative language, the focus was on comparison, subjectivity and value-laden

expressions as proposed by Thompson and Hunston (2000: 13). In addition, I examined the register of the texts where the analysis has been influenced by Biber and Conrad (2009). Evaluation is an important part of reviews and it is the part that features the instances that indicate to the readers whether the product is recommended or not. As I compared the language of professional and non-professional reviewers, the data used in the analysis was collected from two newspaper sites, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, and from two websites dedicated to books, *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing*. The content of book reviews is important for library acquisitions. According to Hajibayova (2019: 613), “*Goodreads*’ reviews are considered a valuable resource for library acquisitions and reference services”. This is one reason that makes analysing book reviews meaningful.

First, I will discuss the background of the methods and reviews in Section 2. This is followed by Section 3 where I will present the data and methods used in the analysis. Section 4 is dedicated for the analysis and presenting the results from the data. I will discuss the results in more detail in Section 5 and Section 6 is dedicated for the conclusion.

2. Background

The language used in various internet platforms has become the focus of scholarly interest, as internet is available for more people and its content is one of the most important sources for information. Some of the genres that have previously existed in other publication forms have been transformed to online platforms or new sub-genres have been created. However, a new setting for communication does not automatically create a new genre but it can bring new elements to it (Giltrow & Stein, 2009: 2). I will first briefly present how genre and register are approached in this study, and then explain how evaluation is detected from a discourse, especially in reviews. Then I will discuss some recent research done on reviews as well as show how book reviews have evolved from print papers to online sites.

2.1. Approaches to genre

The term genre is used in this study to refer to a set of texts that share a communicative purpose and feature distinct linguistic elements that construct the text. Review genre includes many different types of reviews from book reviews to academic reviews, with the similar function of reviewing, giving an opinion. By analysing the genre, it is possible to see how the opinions are conveyed and what is the context the reviews are present in. The term genre, in general, is widely used outside linguistics in the context of movies and art, for instance, and, in the field of linguistics, genre analysis has a long tradition. What makes genre analysis meaningful, is that genres differ and these differences can emerge in various ways (Swales, 1990: 61). For instance, Swales suggests that genres vary in their complexity, how prepared they are, and in terms of their mode and medium.

The notion of discourse community is at centre of Swales definition of genre. The idea of discourse community developed from the concept of speech community, the community a person is born into, and they differ in the sense that being a member of discourse community is usually a choice and it typically focuses on some type of written discourse (Borg, 2003: 398). Discourse community is described in detail by Swales (1990: 24–27) who proposes the following characteristics: it has an agreed set of public goals, it has intercommunication, it uses participatory mechanisms to provide information, it utilises and possesses one or more genres, it has some specific lexis and it has a threshold of members with discursual expertise.

People reviewing books can be thought to be a discourse community. They share the goal of assessing books as they share their opinions in public on books they have chosen to review. Reviewers also have platforms to communicate with each other. The professional reviews are

published in newspapers and magazines, whether online or in print. In contrast, the non-professional reviews are published on various websites where the reviewers are able to communicate more, at least in public, compared to the professional reviewers where the communication is more one way with the audience. Online platforms have made it easier to a wider set of people to communicate and share their opinions. The discourse elements in book reviews have changed as print newspapers and magazines are publishing them on online sites. The book reviews published on newspaper sites also include features from news discourse. In turn, the non-professional reviews feature more informal features of language use. Regarding the discourse community's use of specific lexis, it can be noted that book reviews have terms that might be ambiguous to others. Particularly, this consists of acronyms like "YA" (young adult), "POV" (point of view), "TBR" (to-be-read) and "DNFed" (did-not-finish). These acronyms were present only in the non-professional reviews in the data used in this study. This could imply that it is feature of non-professional reviews but not used in professional reviewers. Traditionally, the experts have had more authority on how books have been perceived, and perhaps they have more influence in the community even today.

People participate in the discourse community by writing and reading reviews. Consequently, genre is inherently a social action because it requires "multiple actions by multiple people" (Devitt, 2004: 33). The occurrence of similar types of texts in similar contexts is how genre conventions are formed. Swales (1990: 45–47) uses the idea of discourse community in his definition of genre which consists of five criteria. It is a class of communicative events that share a set of communicative purposes, and instances of genre can vary in their prototypicality. It establishes constraints in content, positioning and form, and a discourse community's nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight.

Building on Swales' work on discourse community, Paltridge (1995: 398) proposes a framework, which purpose is to explore how users of language "recognise communicative events as instances of particular genres" (394). It has two sections: the interactional frame that presents the contextual features of the genre, and conceptual frame that focuses on the construction of the text. The conceptual frame includes semantic relations that are present in the text defined by Crombie (1985: 18–28). These are, for example, simple contrast where two things are compared on the basis of their differences and chronological sequence where events are reported in chronological order. Paltridge's framework was also influenced by Fillmore (1976) and the notion of prototype is at the centre. A bird is often used as an example of a prototype. When people are asked to think of a bird, most would think of a bird that they encounter often like a pigeon or a crow, which would be more likely a prototypical bird than a

flamingo.

The idea behind the use of prototype theory with genre is that, even though there can be some ambiguousness on the purpose of a text and what genre it presents, “the closer the representation of a genre is to the prototypical image of the genre, the clearer an example it will be as an instance of that particular genre” (Paltridge, 1995: 394). This indicates that a prototype of an online book review meets certain criteria of a book review in a particular discourse community. When assigning a text to a prototype, in this case a book review, the match does not need to be exact but rather sufficient in terms of characteristics. My aim is to detect these characteristics to find out which elements construct an online book review and which kinds of differences professional and non-professional reviews have in their structure.

2.2. Register

Registers are formed from the lexico-grammatical features of texts. A register of a text can be analysed as complimentary to genre analysis, even though the analysis of register has been at times included in the notion of genre. Paltridge (1997: 84) claims that a genre-specific language does not determine the genre but it can show what is more likely for a particular genre. The interest is on lexical and grammatical features of the text rather than on the text as a whole. Biber and Conrad (2009: 6, 78) identify three components of register analysis: the situational context, the linguistic features and the functional relationship between the first two. The analysis of linguistic features includes, for example, the use of pronouns, adjectives or noun phrases. According to Biber and Conrad, register analysis examines the pervasive linguistic features a text has, and the differences that arise in registers are tied to the situational contexts. The situational context affects the chosen register, however, language and context are mutually dependent (Kolata, 2010: 54). This is the functional part of Biber and Conrad's register analysis where they note that the "linguistic features tend to occur in a register because they are particularly well suited to the purposes and situational context of the register" (2009: 6). The register of book reviews is thus affected by the context they are in, which would indicate that there are differences between the professional and the non-professional book reviews due to their different platforms of publication.

Compared to genres, registers can be examined from a general point of view to a very specific situation, because the analysis of register is focused on the pervasive linguistic features of a text (Biber & Conrad, 2009: 16). This means that the data could include excerpts from a specific register. In contrast, Biber and Conrad claim that when analysing genres the focus should be on complete texts as genre markers could only feature in one part of the text. As I am

using both genre and register analysis as complimentary to each other, the data includes complete book reviews. Even though the two frameworks analyse slightly different parts of the texts, they have also similarities. Biber and Conrad's situational context includes same features as Paltridge's interactional frame, and although Biber and Conrad concentrate more on the registers of texts, they propose that the features can be applied to genre analysis.

Analysis of registers of online documents shows that many of these texts have a purpose of expressing opinion, offering advice or persuading the reader (Biber & Egbert, 2018: 106). Reviews fall into the group of expressing opinion, however, because they also feature description they can be categorised as "opinion + informational description". Reviews, in general, are a mixture of evaluation and description but Bhatia (2005: 223) suggests that reviews are becoming more promotional, being mostly positive in evaluation and description. The vast amount of data online also includes content that presents untruthful information and to detect this information register analysis can be applied (Dewang & Singh, 2015).¹ In the case of book reviews, it can be difficult to be certain that the reviewer is being honest. However, according to Hajibayova (2019: 619), the frequent use of personal pronouns on user-generated reviews indicates that the reviewers are honest. The high use of personal pronouns is also considered as a feature of informal texts (Kolata, 2010: 51). In the data used in this study, personal pronouns were used quite often, which could indicate that book reviews, in general, are more informal than formal in the language. Overall, the features of a register are closely tied to the context of the texts and who is writing them, so it is important to compare the language used in the professional and the non-professional book reviews.

2.3. Evaluation

One essential function of reviews is evaluation, which shows the writer's viewpoint of the work. Thompson and Hunston (2000: 6) propose that evaluation is used to perform three functions: to express an opinion, to construct a relationship between a reader and a writer and to construct a discourse. These functions are present in book reviews. The purpose of reviews is to express one's opinion of a work of another person. Through book reviews, writers give their point of view of the book and by sharing that assessment they can affect others' thoughts depending on how persuasive the text is. Thompson and Hunston (2000: 8) suggest that constructing a relationship with the reader can be achieved through persuasion, hedging and politeness, and

¹ Register analysis has been utilised to build an algorithm, which can detect if false opinions are presented in reviews. The false opinions were identified through a number of lexical and syntactic features, for example, verb variation and mean length of the clause (Dewang & Singh, 2015).

the resources that the writer uses will be determined by what kind of relationship they are aiming for. The writer can also indicate the reader how the text is constructed as in telling "the 'point' of the discourse" (2000: 12). Consequently, evaluation is usually clustered to certain parts of the text. One way to construct a discourse is, for example, to propose a question and then answer it: "Sound thrilling? It certainly might be, but it isn't" (*The New York Times*, 12). The reviewer, in the example, uses a question in order to get the reader's attention and then proceeds to explain why it is not thrilling.

To recognise evaluative information in a text, Thompson and Hunston list three criteria that are usually associated with evaluation: comparison, subjectivity and value-laden expressions (2000: 13, 21). Comparison in book reviews can appear in relation to the author's other works or to some entirely different author. Other ways to express comparison include adjectives, adverbs and expressions of negativity. Subjectivity can be expressed by reviewers by explicitly stating their opinion, for example, "I don't think this is anywhere near as strong a book as *The Muse* or *The Miniaturist*" (*Goodreads*, 2.2). In the example both subjectivity and comparison are present. The use of attributing the attitudinal words directly to the writer is more prominent in spoken communication and implicit evaluation is more prevalent for written language (Biber & Zhang, 2018: 100). The value-laden expressions include words that appear frequently in evaluative context, but they can also be thought in terms of goal achievement, where something is considered good if it helps to achieve the goal (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 14). For instance, in "This is a beautifully written novel" (*Goodreads*, 2.1), the adverb *beautifully* positively evaluates the novel. Hunston (2004: 13) claims that evaluation cannot only be interpreted by analysing word choices but also by looking at intertextuality and the context of the evaluative words. Intertextuality refers here to the occurrence of words or phrases in evaluative passages even if they are not immediately recognised as positive or negative. The meaning of evaluative words can be changed by the context they are in, for instance, the word *dramatic*. Hunston (2004: 6) proposes that *dramatic* can have a positive meaning as "aesthetically pleasing" or a negative meaning as "unreliably exaggerated" and "a significant activity with negative effects".

Depending on the genre, parameters of evaluation can be different, some texts prioritise certainty and some the aspect of good or bad (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 24). Book reviews fall in the category of good-bad distinction, as the purpose is to state whether the reviewer had liked the book or not. In contrast, Thompson and Hunston note that academic research articles rely more on the certainty parameter because "they express the writer/speaker's view of the status of propositions and entities" (2000: 24). It is more important to express how certain the

writer is about the information they are presenting compared to book reviews that primarily state whether the book is recommended or not. Evaluation might be affected by the context the review is published in. In academic book reviews, praise and criticism are strategies of evaluation, where the balance of praise and criticism plays a crucial role (Hyland & Diani, 2009: 9). In newspaper context, the reviewer might have pressure to not be too negative in some cases. Consequently, Pool (2007: 88) notes that "[r]eviewing may be a solitary activity, but it isn't a private affair." Therefore, professional reviews present personal opinions but are also aimed for public consumption in a commercial context.

2.4. Research on reviews

In the recent years, the interest regarding the research on reviews has been on sentiment analysis for product reviews as well as on the language of academic reviews. Reviews are evaluative as their function is to recommend, not to recommend or to critically assess something whether it is a product or an experience. According to Hyland and Diani (2009: 1), evaluation is a central part of review genres. Reviews of popular culture i.e. music, movies, art and books are similar sub-genres to each other in the vast area of the review genres. Consequently, Taboada (2011) argues that online movie reviews have two stages: descriptive and evaluative. These two stages have also been found in reviews of performing arts, which include three additional elements: analytic, entertainment and instruction (Shrum, 1991: 352). In the analytic element, the reviewer opens up symbolic meanings and metaphors for readers, and the entertainment and the instructive elements are usually interwoven with the other three stages through, for instance, humour in the case of entertainment.

De Jong's (2013: 78) study on movie reviews, in turn, indicates that consumers are more evaluative in their reviews compared to professional critics and that professional critics try to stay more neutral in the reviews. This could mean that, in general, consumers are more expressive of their feelings in reviews compared to professional critics. A study of consumer reviews shows that they can be divided into three categories depending on the focus of the reviews: author-based, reader-based, and product-based reviews (Skalicky, 2013: 86). The author-based reviews centre around the writer of the review, the reader-based reviews include second-person pronouns and focus on the reader, and the product-based reviews concentrate on the product reviewed.

The variation of the language of professional and user-generated reviews has been studied with a focus on marketing (Niraj & Singh, 2015) and by conducting content analysis on different types of reviews (Sich, 2017; Parikh et al., 2017). The main interest has been on the

content rather than on the linguistic features. Focusing on the quality of reviews, Sich (2017: 93) argues that traditional sources of book reviews, like newspapers, have better quality reviews compared to reviews on *Amazon*. One positive correlation was found between the length of the review and the quality, which is most likely due to the fact that longer reviews have more content. Shorter reviews, which are more common among the non-professional reviewers, do not give as much insight to the books if the readers want to know what happens. According to Hajibayova (2019, 613), the content of reviews is important for library acquisitions. Consequently, professional sources are more relevant for libraries as they feature more content (Sich, 2017: 93). Even though professional reviews are considered to be more useful for library acquisitions, non-professional reviews could offer an additional insight on what people think about the books.

2.5. From print to online

In the present study, I examined online book reviews, which include both professional and non-professional reviewers. Traditionally, book reviews have been published in print newspapers but, nowadays, most content can be found online as the demand for print papers has declined. According to Pool (2007: 1), book reviews appeared in the United States the first time during the 18th century, as literacy grew and more books were published, the act of reviewing also emerged. In the past couple of decades, people have been writing about the decline of book reviewing mostly due to the decline of print media and the cuts of book reviews from newspapers (Ciabattari, 2011). However, books are still reviewed but reviewing has shifted to online and websites dedicated for book reviews have emerged.

Commonly, reviewers are divided into professionals and amateurs. However, Pool (2007: 37) argues that between these two groups fall reader-reviewers who are not considered to be professionals but contribute to book reviewing websites like *Amazon* or *Goodreads* because publishers has asked them to. It can be difficult to separate the reviews considered amateur reviews from semi-professional reviewers, and, in this study, the distinction between professional and non-professional reviews has been made on the basis of where the reviews have been published. When I refer to professional reviewers, it includes those whose work has been published on newspaper sites, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, and non-professional reviews were selected from the websites, *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing*, where it can be assumed that the writers have not been paid for their work.

Book reviews present opinions about new books, which is why it is important that they

include evaluation as well as description (Pool, 2007: 10). However, reviews on *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* are written after the reviewers have read the book, whether it is right after the publishing or long after that. This would indicate that the non-professional reviews have slightly different functions. Traditional book reviews are published soon after the books have been published and they are written by a figure of authority, compared to reviews on *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* which are written by peers and showcase the vast variety of people's thoughts of the books.

Professional book reviews published on newspaper sites have some features of news discourse, for instance, they have headlines that are used to capture reader's attention. Ungerer (2000: vii) notes that grabbing the reader's attention is important for all texts. In the present study, the professional book reviews are from newspaper sites and they have headlines, which means that they should be attractive to the reader. Book reviews do differ from other articles on the newspaper sites but they also need to hold the attention of readers. Cotter (2010: 27) lists characterisations of news language and one of them is the use of quotes. In news articles, the quotes function as a way to confirm and support claims. In a similar way, reviews published in newspapers include quotes. The context of professional book reviews has changed from print to online bringing new features to the genre. In addition, the emerge of non-professional reviews has widened the area of fiction book reviews and enabled for more people to share their opinions.

3. Materials and Methods

In this section, I will discuss the material in more detail presenting the sources of the reviews and how the material was collected. Then, the second part is dedicated to a description of the method used in the analysis.

3.1. Reviews

My data consists of reviews published on two newspaper sites, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, as well as of reviews written on two websites, *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing*. These sources were chosen because of their position in the field of book reviews. *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* represent major publications and a certain standard is expected from them. In the case of the user-generated websites, Goodreads is one of the most popular site dedicated only for books. It is an Amazon owned social website with 90 million users and 90 million reviews (Goodreads, 2020). *Goodreads* is not only for user-generated content but also authors can interact with readers as well as promote their own books. Although *LibraryThing* is not as popular, it has high enough profile with 2,5 million users (LibraryThing, 2020).

The reviews were written about fiction books published in 2019 and the professional reviews collected for analysis were published during the period from August to October 2019. The chosen reviews were the six newest fiction reviews on the sites on the date of collection. So, reviews of non-fiction and poetry were not included in the data. After the six book reviews were chosen from each newspaper site, corresponding reviews were chosen from the two websites. The reviews are listed on both *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* according to the number of likes they have received and the time they have been posted. For each book on the websites I chose two reviews, first the most popular review and second the newest one at the time the data was collected. This choice was made to see some variation in the non-professional reviews, as the most popular ones were longer and more time have been put into them but they do not represent the data in its entirety. In the case of one book on *LibraryThing*, there was only one review, so I took one additional review based on another book posted on *LibraryThing*.

In order to leave a review on *Goodreads* or *LibraryThing*, people need to register to the websites, which means that I have access to some information of the reviewers. Most of the information on the profiles is not relevant for the purposes of this study, but if a person had mentioned that they are or have been a professional reviewer, I did not include their review in my data. This was the case on two occasions. In addition, one review was not included in the data because the reviewer was not from a country where English is an official language. All the

reviews are available for the public online, except that to gain access to the reviews on *The New York Times*, people need to register to the website. Because the reviews are publicly available, there are no ethical issues in the analysis of the data.

Table 1. The word counts of the professional and the non-professional reviews.

	Number of Reviews	Highest word account	Lowest word account	Average word account	Total word account
Professional reviews	12	1,531	362	1,019	12,230
<i>The New York Times</i>	6	1,531	682	1,169	7,011
<i>The Guardian</i>	6	1,515	362	870	5,219
Non-professional reviews	48	2,069	25	315	15,101
<i>Goodreads</i>	24	2,069	25	809	9,711
<i>LibraryThing</i>	24	715	26	225	5,390
In total	60	2,069	25	456	27,331

In total, I analysed twelve newspaper reviews, six from *The Guardian* and six from *The New York Times*. The lengths of the professional reviews range from 362 words to 1,531 words, and the combined word count is approximately 12,000 words. There are twenty-four reviews from *Goodreads* as well as from *LibraryThing*, as I took two reviews for each of the twelve books reviewed on the newspaper sites. The non-professional review lengths range from 25 words to 2,069 words, the average being 315 words. In total, the word count for the non-professional reviews is approximately 15,000. Table 1 shows in more detail how the word accounts are divided in each source. In the case of *Goodreads* the average length of reviews does not give an accurate picture of the data. There are two longer reviews, but mostly the lengths are between 300 and 500 words. A full list of the book reviews included in this study can be found in Appendix. The examples presented in the analysis have the publication platform of the review and a number like (*The Guardian*, 3), which indicates where the original source can be found in Appendix. Some of the reviews also included links in the text which were retained in the examples used in the analysis, in order to present the material as authentically as possible.

3.2. Method

Genre conventions and evaluation were examined in the material, and parts of the framework proposed by Paltridge (1995, 1997) were used in the analysis. The model is divided into two frames: the interactional frame and the conceptual frame. The interactional frame includes contextual elements of the genre: who are the sender and the receiver, and what is the message form, the channel and the code of a text. It also covers the topic of the text, the setting where the text is present and the function. The elements cover the contextual features of the genre analysed. The conceptual frame focuses on the structural components of the text describing the structure and semantic relations, like simple contrast and cause – effect relations. Simple contrast refers to a situation in the text where two things are compared in their differences, and cause – effect relations describe what has happened and why.

In the analysis, I determined the obligatory and optional elements of the reviews and where they occur in the text, focusing on the sequencing and recursion of different stages. The previous research on reviews indicates at least two stages that are present in the data consisted of reviews: evaluation and description. These two stages were analysed to see to what extent they are present in the material, and whether there were any additional stages. The evaluative and descriptive stages were each analysed from four aspects that were present in the data. Evaluation was directed to the book in general, its characters, the writing or the author. In turn, description covered the plot, the characters, the setting or the background of the author.

As one crucial part of book reviews is evaluation, I analysed how evaluation is expressed in the texts by professional and non-professional reviewers. The elements examined are the ones proposed in the background, which were comparison, subjectivity and value-laden expressions. Comparison is expressed usually against some norm and, in the case of book reviews, the books are also compared to other books. The norm or "yardstick" is something that is expected and comparison against it is expressed with comparative adjectives and adverbs, as well as words like *just*, *lack* and *only* (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 21). Subjectivity appears, for instance, in constructions like "I really liked the book" (*LibraryThing*, 12.2). The group of value-laden expressions includes many words that express evaluation in themselves and expressions that become evaluative in the context they appear.

The registers of professional and non-professional reviews were compared by following Biber and Conrad's (2009) framework to determine what differences professional and non-professional registers have in online book reviews. In the framework, three aspects are present: contextual, linguistic and functional relationship of the other two. The focus was on the

linguistic and the functional features, as the contextual differences are covered in the interactional frame. The linguistic elements examined were the use of pronouns when the reviewers address the readers and express their own opinions, as well as the use of adverbs and adjectives in the context of different aspects of the books. The analysis of the register was linked with the analysis of evaluative language. These features were chosen after a close reading of the data.

4. Analysis

The first section of the analysis presents the interactional features of online book reviews. The different stages of online book reviews and the overall structure of the stages are examined in Section 4.2. This is followed by Section 4.3, where the evaluative language of the reviews is analysed in detail focusing on comparison, subjectivity and value-laden expressions.

4.1. Interactional frame

The interactional frame in Paltridge's (1997) framework covers the contextual features of a genre. The focus of this study is on online book reviews written in English, which determines that the message form is English. The channel of book reviews is written, therefore the texts have gone through some thought and editing. Here arises some differences between the professional and the non-professional reviews. Even though both professional and non-professional reviews are prepared before they are shared with others, the reviews published on newspaper sites go through more inspection and editing. One indication of this is that the non-professional reviews included some grammatical errors and spelling mistakes, for example, "Howwever" and "persue".

In the case of book reviews, the sender is a person writing the review i.e. the reviewer. A reviewer is not required to have a specific profession in order to review books but, when writing for a newspaper, they might be expected to have some knowledge on literature compared to people who are writing reviews on their free-time. The professional reviews are written by people working for, in this case, *The New York Times* or *The Guardian*, which means that they are paid for the work. Most of the users on *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* do not have access to publish their texts on newspaper sites. However, writers for newspapers can write also on these user-generated websites. Therefore, the group of newspaper writers is more exclusive and restricted. In addition, the writers for newspaper sites can be considered to have more authority. In the professional reviews, the distance between the writer and the reader is wider compared to the non-professional reviews on *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* because they are peer reviews.

The receiver of a book review is the audience reading the review, which consists of a great number of people. As the number of users on the websites indicate, reading is popular and reviews are used as a source of recommendations. Reviews are written by one person, so there is one sender and the number of receivers can vary from zero to a large number of people. On the newspaper sites, the relationship between sender and receiver is not interactive. The reviews on *The Guardian* have an comment function for people registered on the site, however, the

number of comments in the reviews analysed in this study are low. In contrast, the user-generated websites also have a comment feature and conversation occurs between the reviewer and other users more frequently. However, in general, book reviews do not form a very interactive discourse. The topic of book reviews is quite self-evident, they discuss about books, and the function of book reviews is to describe and to evaluate, which are discussed more in the following sections.

The settings of online book reviews for the professional and the non-professional reviews have differences and similarities. First of all, they are both online and publicly available. In addition, the reader can easily distinguish the book reviews from other content on the online sites as the reviews are posted under the heading *reviews*. Nonetheless, the professional reviews are published on newspaper sites and they have some features of newspaper articles, for example, each professional review has a bolded headline. The following examples (1) and (2) are from *The Guardian*.

- (1) The Confession by Jessie Burton review – an understated triumph
(*The Guardian*, 2)
- (2) Heaven, My Home by Attica Locke review – compelling Texas noir
(*The Guardian*, 3)

As examples (1) and (2) show, the headlines of the reviews on *The Guardian* have the name of the author and the book. In addition, they explicitly state that the following piece is a review and the headlines include a couple of words that describe and evaluate the book. The books are most of the time positively evaluated. In two of the headlines, the book is described with an adjective "compelling" like in example (2), and one with "irresistible". On *The Guardian*, when the review itself is not that positive, the headline is not evaluative either: "[...] – hints of happy ending" (*The Guardian*, 5). It seems that when the review is not very positive the headlines on *The Guardian* are more descriptive.

The headlines of the reviews on *The Guardian* seem to have this set style compared to *The New York Times'* headlines, where more variation is present. The headlines on *The New York Times* do not demonstrate as clearly which book is reviewed. Five out of six headlines do present the name of the author but, in general, the headlines are more creative in comparison to *The Guardian*, which can be seen in headlines (3) and (4).

- (3) Imagining the World of Nazi Hunters
(*The New York Times*, 11)

- (4) Ta-Nehisi Coates's Debut Novel Mingles History and Fantasy
(*The New York Times*, 8)

As examples (3) and (4) indicate, *The New York Times'* headlines are not as evaluative and are more descriptive compared to *The Guardian's* headlines. Example (3) does not name the book reviewed but describes the topic of the book. In example (4) the author's name is included in the headline and some features of the book are presented. The user-generated websites do not have headings for reviews and there is no option for this unless the writer wants to start the review with their own headline, which was not present in any of the reviews in the data.

The reviews on *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* are posted on a page dedicated for the book reviewed, which means that the reviews do not need to be introduced like in a newspaper context. On *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing*, under the name of the book is the star rating, which combines all the ratings into an average. This feature gives the reader the first impression on how well the book is liked, compared to the newspaper settings analysed where the books are not rated with stars or numbers. Star rating is quite often used in popular culture reviews. Giving star ratings to books is easy and the reviewer does not need to give any reasoning for the ratings, which can be seen in the higher number of star ratings the books have compared to the number of reviews per book.

The webpages include a picture of the cover of the book. This applies to the newspaper sites as well, all the reviews have a picture of the book, the author or both. On the user-generated websites, the picture of the book is not part of the text but it is possible to include pictures in the text. Another multimedia and newspaper article feature of the texts are links to other webpages. Among the professional reviews, nine out twelve reviews had links in the running text that is 75%. In turn, only 11% of the non-professional reviews had links in the text that is five out of forty-eight reviews. Most of the professional reviews included links to other pieces published on the newspaper site, for example, to other reviews. The links are present in the text, for instance, when the authors mention another book or author.

4.2. Stages of online book reviews

The two main functions of online book reviews are to describe and to evaluate the book. Table 2 below shows the number of instances of the two stages, description and evaluation, are present in book reviews. In addition, the number of reviews that use quotes from the books can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The presence of different stages of book reviews in the data.

	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Goodreads</i>	<i>LibraryThing</i>
Description	6	6	20	21
Book/Plot	6	6	19	16
Author	4	4	1	6
Characters	6	6	15	14
Setting	3	3	13	6
Evaluation	6	6	24	24
Book/Plot	6	6	22	21
Author	5	4	6	9
Writing	6	5	18	11
Characters	2	3	12	9
Quotes from the books	5	6	6	2
Number of reviews	6	6	24	24

The obligatory stages of online book reviews have been bolded in Table 2, which shows that the descriptive stage is present in almost all of the reviews. The descriptive stage was divided into four categories regarding the objects of description, which were the book and the plot, information of the author, the characters and the setting of the story. The descriptive stages in the reviews are important and all the professional reviews have description, which also covers the majority of the reviews. The plot and characters are described in all of the professional reviews and information of the author is given in over half of the reviews. Most of the professional reviews present a chronological overview of the plot and, at times, give the ending away. The setting of the book is described less but it is present in six of the twelve professional reviews. Examples (5) and (6) represent instances of description from the reviews.

- (5) The novel follows Hiram “Hi” Walker, a 12-year-old slave on a Virginia plantation ironically named Lockless, whose many intellectual gifts include a photographic memory.
(*The New York Times*, 8)
- (6) Goldie was the winner of the Costa short story award in 2017
(*The Guardian*, 6)

Example (5) is from a beginning of a review where the main character is introduced. This passage was included in the character description in Table 2 as it gives the reader quite detailed information of the character. In turn, example (6) presents information of the author of the book. Usually, the background information includes mentions of the author's previous publications and in example (6) the reviewer shows that the author's writing has been rewarded.

As Table 2 indicates, the description of books is less consistent in the non-professional reviews, it is not as essential stage as it is for the professional reviews. Seven out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews do not have description in them. These were mostly the shorter reviews that only focused on evaluating the books. A number of the non-professional reviews did describe the book in detail but there was more variation compared to the professional reviews. Especially, information about the author was not as frequent in non-professional reviews compared to professional reviews, and, at times, the reviewer depicted only what kind of characters were in the novel. Example (7) shows a brief description of a book.

- (7) The story of two Ethiopian women fighting against the invasion of their country by Italy in 1935.
(*LibraryThing*, 9.1)

Here the plot is not really described but the reader gets a sense of the book, the characters and the setting are mentioned but not elaborated any further. Most of the non-professional reviews had a longer description of the book in comparison to example (7) but usually they were shorter than in the professional reviews.

Table 2 shows that the evaluative stage in the reviews is obligatory but the way it is present in the text can vary. Evaluation was directed at four distinctive aspects in the reviews, which were the book and the plot in general, the author of the book, the writing quality and the characters of the book. Most commonly both professional and non-professional reviewers comment on the plot or the writing quality. The professional reviewers evaluate the book, the writing and the author most consistently. In turn, the non-professional reviewers are more divided on what is evaluated and, particularly, the evaluation is directed at the author less. The writing is evaluated in over half of the non-professional reviews but still less than in professional reviews. The following example (8) is a complete non-professional review where description is absent.

- (8) Eh. This must have been recommended to me because it's not the "type" of book I gravitate towards -- and, as it seems, for good reason. I thought it was fine, but fairly predictable, with unoriginal dialogue.
(*Goodreads*, 11.2)

After reading example (8), the reader does not have new information on what happens in the book. The reviewer evaluates the book and plot in general noting that it is "fine" but "predictable". The writing quality is also negatively evaluated with "unoriginal dialogue", and, overall, the review is not overtly positive one.

The last category in Table 2 shows how many of the reviews include direct quotes from the books. There is a clear distinction between the number of professional and non-professional reviews that have used quotes. In the case of professional reviews, 91% had direct quotes compared to 17% in the non-professional reviews. The quotes vary from several sentences to couple of words and they function as a descriptive device. The shorter in-text quotes are more commonly used in the newspaper reviews such as the following:

- (9) Given wide breadth here, for example, is the practice of raising slaves alongside their future masters, “so that one shall be a queen and the other shall be a footstool.”
(*The New York Times*, 8)

In example (9), the quote is embedded in the text. The reviewer writes about one of the thematic elements in the book by paraphrasing what happens and then including the quote. All except one from the professional reviews have included quotes in the text. In contrast, only eight out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews have quotes and only one of them is a short in-text quote. The quotes used in reviews are part of the reason why the professional reviews are longer in length on average.

The shorter quotes embedded in the text are used often purely to describe the book. In addition, quotes function as evidence for arguments, whether they are more descriptive or evaluative. This applies especially to longer block quotes consisting of one or more sentences. Examples (10) and (11) are passages preceding longer quotes in the reviews.

- (10) That’s because of Joseph Kanon’s mastery of the quotidian detail in “The Accomplice,”
[...] And his crisp dialogue:
(*The New York Times*, 11)

- (11) The house in [Ann Patchett](#)’s eighth novel is the last word in desirable real estate.
(*The Guardian*, 1)

The first one, example (10), positively evaluates the writing and, consequently, shows a passage from the book to give evidence. The reviewer states that the dialogue of the book is "crisp", which is a positive thing, and after that an excerpt of the dialogue is presented. In example (11), the reviewer does not evaluate the writing but rather describes the setting of the book. The quote is similarly used to verify the statement the reviewer makes as the sentence is followed by a description of the house from the novel. In the non-professional reviews, the quotes were mostly used in similar manner but not as much as in professional reviews.

Among the non-professional reviews, there were some features in the use of quotes that differed from the professional reviews. First, in five out of the eight reviews that included quotes, the quote was at the beginning of the review and did not have any explanation for the

use. The readers have to just interpret their importance from the fact they have been included in the review in the first place. Second, three of the reviews had page numbers at the end of the quote. Example (12) is from a beginning of a review.

- (12) We had heard of them and their brute ways, but until you know something you do not know it. (Girl, by Edna O'Brien, p.85)
It was the kidnapping of the schoolgirls by the [Nigerian Jihadist group Boko Haram](#) that first made me disdain #Hashtag campaigns as useless.
(*LibraryThing*, 4.1)

Here, in example (12), the reviewer does not acknowledge the quote, which does not have quotation marks but the page is marked, and the following text does not seem to relate to the quote. The origin of the quote is clear but its relevance is a bit unclear for the reader. In the professional reviews, the quotes did not have page numbers but the reason for the presence of the quotes was always evident.

In addition to the evaluative and descriptive stages, the professional reviews have a promotional stage. At the end of the *Guardian's* reviews, there are instructions on how to get the book. *The New York Times* has at the beginning of the reviews a "BUY BOOK" button as well as instructions on where to purchase the book at the end of the reviews. This stage is not present in the actual text of the non-professional reviews. However, both *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* have links to other sites where the book can be bought on the same page where the reviews are posted. In half of the professional reviews, the promotional stage also includes information of the reviewer, especially if they are an author themselves. The decision to include a certain book in the list of reviewed books in a newspaper is itself a promotional one. The professional reviews are published in a commercial setting as noted in Section 2.3, and whether the reviews are positive or negative they give attention to the book by featuring it in a newspaper site.

In ten out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews, the reviewer included a mention of a publisher or thanks a publisher from which they have received the book they have reviewed. One typical example of this is "Thank you to NetGalley and Atria for a copy!" (*Goodreads*, 11.1). These reviewers have received a free copy of the book to be review, and it is noticeable feature of the non-professional reviews. The publishing companies use this as a way to get attention for the book before it is published. The reviewers receive a free copy of the book but the language and the stages of the reviews were similar to the other non-professional reviews, so the inclusion of these reviews in the data was justified. These reviewers also represent the group that is between professional and non-professional reviewers as discussed in Section 2.5.

In addition to the descriptive and the evaluative stage, three other elements in reviews were proposed by Shrum (1991: 352) which were instruction, analytic and entertainment. Two of the professional reviews and seven of the non-professional reviews included instructions, which relate to the instructive element of the reviews. Most of the instructions were present in context of *if*-construction like in following examples:

(13) If you are a Stephen King fan you will want to include this novel in your "to-be-read" bookshelves.
(*LibraryThing*, 7.1)

(14) if it takes you 41 words to explain your simile (it wasn't a metaphor, and I counted), I hereby submit that you may be doing it wrong.
(*The New York Times*, 12)

Example (13) indicates that if the reader belongs to this group of people, they should act a certain way. The reviewer directly addresses the reader with a second-person pronoun *you* repeating it three times in the sentence. Interestingly, in example (14), the reviewer addresses the author of the book reviewed with the pronoun *you*. The reviewer takes a position of someone who knows better. Both first- and second-person pronouns *I* and *you* are repeated in the passage. The reviewer does use hedging by including the auxiliary verb "may" in the phrase. This aspect where the reviewers question the writers' or publishers' decisions is present in one other professional review and in three non-professional reviews. Instructions were also expressed with the use of imperative verb forms:

(15) Try this: Only read Aunt Lydia's sections, flipping quickly past the character-as-mouthpiece young women. You'll get an interesting sidebar to the amazing *The Handmaid's Tale*.
(*LibraryThing*, 5.2)

Here, in example (15), the reviewer uses "try" and "read" to indicate what the reader should do and the future tense is used to suggest what the readers will get if the instructions are followed. The instructive stage is connected with evaluation, for instance, in example (15) the reviewer implies that only part of the book is good and the reader should only read the good part.

An analytic element, where the reviewer opens up themes or metaphors from the book for the readers, can be found in six out of the twelve professional reviews. For example, in one of the professional reviews the reviewer explains how some thematic elements of the book relate to other works, or one reviewer opens up paradoxes that are present in the book. The analytic stage was found in six of the twelve professional reviews and only in one of the forty-eight non-professional reviews. The element of entertainment was also present in couple of the reviews.

It was mostly expressed through humour or sarcasm. Reviewers used sarcasm in reviews that presented the book in more negative light.

One additional stage could be formed from the background information that is present in the professional reviews. The professional reviews have more background information, not only about the author but about the theme and the genre of the book. The professional reviews also contain more mentions of other books and other authors without a direct comparison to the book reviewed. This stage, which is only present in three out of the twelve professional reviews, is commented by one professional reviewer in the review.

(16) I know you're supposed to begin book reviews with subtlety and a nod to storytelling's past and the long literary tradition
(*The New York Times*, 10)

In example (16), the reviewer writes about how the review should begin with "a nod to storytelling's past" which is not present in this particular review and not found in many reviews in the data. This could be a tradition that is not as popular anymore or a feature that the data does not represent correctly as only three professional reviews out of the twelve has this stage, and it does not appear in any of the non-professional reviews.

The structure of online book reviews is not set and as long as the evaluative and, most of the time, the descriptive stages are present, it does not matter in what order they appear in the text. In the professional reviews, when the evaluation is placed in the middle of the text, it is often followed by a passage from or description of the book that supports the evaluation. Even though evaluation is usually spread throughout the entire review, ten out of the twelve professional reviews finished with an evaluative sentence or paragraph. Consequently, the non-professional reviews also end with an evaluative passage in most cases, only four out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews ended with a descriptive passage. Example (17) shows an ending of a professional review.

(17) "The Starless Sea" flounders as a novel. [...] But for those swept away by the romance of its imagery, "The Starless Sea" will provide hours of honey-drenched bliss. Or at the very least, inspiration for a new tattoo, or a vision board for their impending destination wedding.
(*The New York Times*, 12)

The review where example (17) is from is more on the negative side and the end of the reviews is a bit sarcastic, which was mentioned as a part of the entertainment element of reviews. According to the reviewer, the book "flounders" which is not a positive quality. The reviewer compliments the imagery but implies that it is one of few good features of the book. In the case

of the non-professional reviews, one third of the reviews (fifteen out of forty-eight) ended with a short sentence either explicitly or implicitly recommending the book. Eight of the sentences were also incomplete like "Simply brilliant!" (*Goodreads*, 6.1) or "Highly recommended" (*LibraryThing*, 9.2). The evaluative stage concludes the review and presents the final opinion of the reviewer in case it was not clear before that.

The professional reviews often begin with a descriptive passage whether it is about the author, the book or something general about the topic of the book. Examples (18) and (19) are from beginnings of the professional reviews.

(18) It's 1996 and just another day in Nightingale Point, a block of flats on a London estate.
(*The Guardian*, 6)

(19) Pastiche (alternately, homage or fan fiction) is a venerable genre.
(*The New York Times*, 12)

In example (18), the reviewer starts the review by giving a description of the book. This review was clearly divided into two parts, first the description of the plot and then an evaluative paragraph in the end. In turn, the reviewer in example (19) discusses the genre of the book in the beginning. The first paragraph of the review is dedicated for general description of the genre and other authors and after that the focus is shifted to the book reviewed. In contrast, the non-professional reviews more often start with evaluation, however the divide between description and evaluation at the beginning of the non-professional reviews was not that noticeable. Twenty-seven out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews had evaluation at the beginning of the review. So, the two most common constructions for book reviews are:

Description — Evaluation

Evaluation — Description — Evaluation.

These structures show how the stages are situated in the reviews from a broad point of view. At times, the descriptive passages do feature evaluative adjectives or adverbs.

Most of the professional reviews describe the plot, which means that the review is a summary of the plot with some evaluative passages. Most of the professional reviews give a detailed account on what happens in the book by presenting the plot and characters in present tense. The reviews describe the plot in a chronological sequence which is one of the semantic relations proposed by Crombie (1985: 18–28). As the description can include the setting of the book, semantic relations related to a setting were used in the description, which are the location, direction and manner of the event. The description has also cause-effect relations, where the

reviewer describes how the actions in the book result in certain outcomes. This cause-effect relation can also be seen in evaluative passages where the reviewers explain why something was positive or negative in the book. Another semantic relation of evaluation is simple comparison and contrast. The books were compared to other works in both their similarities and differences. This was analysed in more detail in section 4.3.1.

One noticeable feature of the professional and the non-professional reviews was how the book and the author were addressed and talked about throughout the reviews. All of the professional reviews featured the name of the book and both the first and last name of the author. In contrast, in the non-professional reviews often the name of the book was not present at all. Only sixteen out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews featured the name of the book that is 33%. When the non-professional reviewers refer to the book reviewed they use expressions like *the book* and *this book*. The author is usually mentioned by name but rarely more than once. Twenty-nine out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews include the name of the author in the text that is 60% of the reviews. In the non-professional reviews the word *book* is more common compared to the word *novel*. In turn, the professional reviewers use *novel* more often compared to *book*, and they sometimes use both words in the review, when the non-professional reviewers used one of the terms in the reviews.

From the elements found here a prototype of online book reviews can be constructed (see section 2.1). A prototypical online book review consists of a descriptive stage and an evaluative stage, and a evaluative passage concludes the review. The reviews typically have contrast and comparison in their structure. Furthermore, in prototypical professional online book reviews, the description includes information of the plot and characters of the book as well as quotes. The name of the book and the author are introduced at the beginning of the review and are repeated throughout the review. The evaluative stage, in professional reviews, directs the evaluation to the book as a whole and to the writing style. In addition, the professional reviews have a promotional stage. In turn, prototypical non-professional online reviews describe the plot of the book and evaluate the plot. The writer is usually named in the non-professional reviews but the name of the book is commonly absent. This is likely due to the context of non-professional reviews, as they are posted on page dedicated to the book reviewed which has the name of the book. Furthermore, star rating is a prototypical feature of non-professional reviews.

4.3. Evaluative language

The analysis of the stages of online book reviews has shown that evaluation is the one obligatory element of the reviews, and depending on the review, it can appear only in one sentence or it can be obvious from the whole text how the reviewer feels about the book. The data has more positive reviews than negative ones, and ten out of all the sixty reviews feature both positive and negative evaluation of the book. The evaluation is more direct and explicitly positive or negative in the non-professional reviews. Six out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews are negative ones. In contrast, all the professional reviewers write something positive about the books, and, in four cases, the reviews contained also negative evaluation. There were two books out of the twelve books that the both groups of reviewers write in more negative light. In the data, the professional and the non-professional reviewers are mostly in agreement on whether the book is good or bad.

One prominent feature of the non-professional reviews is the star rating. As I mentioned earlier, the user-generated websites include star ratings on the reviews. On *Goodreads*, the rating of each individual user is at the beginning of the review, and on *LibraryThing*, the rating is at the end of each review. The star ratings on the reviews vary from one to five. The stars evaluate the books without words, so in the review the users can elaborate on why the book was given that particular rating. In six out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews, the reviewers refer to the star rating in the text: "I found it nearly perfect and it is 4.5 stars" (*Goodreads*, 1.1), "the unresolved ending prevented this from being a five star read for me" (*LibraryThing*, 2.2). In the examples, the reviewers justify the ratings in the text and in both cases the book is "nearly perfect".

The analysis of evaluative language has been divided into three sections. In section 4.3.1, the focus is on comparison and how it is used as an evaluative device in book reviews. Then, in section 4.3.2, I analysed how subjectivity is present in the reviews and how the reviewers address the readers. Section 4.3.2 is dedicated for the analysis of value-laden expressions in the book reviews.

4.3.1. Comparison

Comparison is used in the reviews by comparing the book or the author to other books and authors. Comparison appears also in contrast to some norm with words like only, just and lack, for example, "The writing occasionally lacks vibrancy" (*The New York Times*, 8). Here the

comparison is expressed to a writing which has "vibrancy". Table 3. shows how comparison as an evaluative strategy is used in online book reviews.

Table 3. The number of reviews featuring comparison.

	<i>LibraryThing</i>	<i>Goodreads</i>	Non-prof. in total	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The NYT</i>	Prof. in total
Other books	4	0	8 %	1	2	25 %
Other authors	0	2	4 %	2	2	33 %
Works by the same author	3	6	19 %	3	2	42 %
Total number of reviews including comparison	7	6	27%	5	3	67%

As Table 3 demonstrates, comparison is a more frequent feature in the professional reviews. When the comparisons to other authors and books by other authors were counted, I only included instances where names of other authors or books were mentioned. When the three categories from Table 3 are taken into account, comparison is found in 27% of the non-professional reviews and in 67% of the professional reviews. Eight out of the twelve professional reviews compared the book reviewed to other works or authors. Seven reviews out of the twenty-four on *LibraryThing* had comparison, so the reviewers either compared the books to works by other authors or to works by the same author. In addition, eight reviews out of twenty-four from *Goodreads* used comparison as an evaluative strategy. The comparison of the book to the author's earlier works was most frequent form of comparison among both professional and non-professional reviewers. The numbers present in Table 3 clearly show that professional reviewers use more comparison as an evaluative method compared to non-professional reviewers.

Comparison is used to convey both positive and negative evaluation by the professional and the non-professional reviewers. Two following passages from the professional reviews indicate positive and negative comparison when compared to books of other authors.

- (20) And not because this book expects too much of its readers; following Zampanò in Mark Z. Danielewski's "[House of Leaves](#)" is no simple stroll. But Morgenstern's attempt to

mingle a dozen or so narratives into an intertwined myth is strangely devoid of tension
(*The New York Times*, 12)

- (21) If *The Dutch House* is like a novel by James, however, then it's most like *The Spoils of Poynton*, cleverly appropriating that book's use of a coveted house
(*The Guardian*, 1)

First, example (20) contrasts the writing style to another book describing it as somewhat difficult to follow and claims that the reviewed book was even more difficult, which interfered the reading and was "devoid of tension". The reviewer also emphasises that it is not the reader's fault in the first sentence of the example justifying the comment. Example (21), in turn, compares the book in positive light, which can be seen in the use of "cleverly appropriating". Comparison to books by other authors was present in non-professional reviewers only on *LibraryThing* like in the following:

- (22) I liked it better than the horrifying stories of the Underground Railroad by Colan Whitehead.
(*LibraryThing*, 8.1)

In example (22), the reviewer states how the book was "better" than the other book. The comparative adverb *better* is evaluative itself and, in addition, the reviewer names another similar book. As Table 3 shows, one third of the professional reviews feature instances where the book or author was compared to another author like in the following example (23).

- (23) *Heaven, My Home* is a propulsive and compelling novel, worthy of [comparisons to Walter Mosley](#).
(*The Guardian*, 3)

Here the book is compared to other author rather than to a specific book by someone else. This comparison in example (23) is a positive one. The reviewer uses adjectives "propulsive" and "compelling" and then emphasises the worthiness of the comparison. In example (23), the comparison is also explicitly stated. Among non-professional reviews, this comparative strategy was infrequently used.

Most often when comparison to other books was used, the book was compared to the author's earlier works. This was also expressed in both positive and negative way.

- (24) What one notices here, however, is a more free-flowing aspect to her prose, which is plainer and less obstructed by overworked passages than her earlier work.
(*The Guardian*, 2)

- (25) I don't think this is anywhere near as strong a book as [The Muse](#) or [The Miniaturist](#)
(*Goodreads*, 5.2)

In example (24), the reviewer contrasts the writing to the author's earlier works. The comparative adjectives "more free-flowing" and "less obstructed" are indicators that the writing has improved and in the context the adjective "plainer" can be understood as a positive feature. Example (25) by a non-professional reviewer shows the reviewer's disappointment towards the book based on the authors previous publications, the comparison is clear with an added emphasis of "anywhere near as strong".

Comparison does not only appear in the context of comparing the books directly to others works or authors. Therefore, I examined words *just*, *only* and *lack*, comparative adverbs and adjectives, as well as expressions of negativity used in evaluation to show comparison to some norm (Thompson & Hunston, 2000: 21). In these examples, the comparisons are made to some existing standard. When the number of reviews including these instances of comparison are added to the numbers presented in Table 3, all professional reviews had a comparative element in the evaluation of the book, and thirty of the non-professional reviews have some type on comparison. So, in total, 63% of the non-professional reviews used comparison in the evaluation compared to 100% in the professional reviews. In example (26) and (27), comparison is expressed with the use of *only* (emphasis added).

(26) **Only** Patchett's skill as a writer could make me care so much about these unsympathetic characters.
(*LibraryThing*, 1.1)

(27) [...] but beyond that, we **only** had the vaguest hints of how the larger world worked.
(*The Guardian*, 5)

In example (26), the skill of writing is complimented and the reviewer compares the author to all other authors by using the word *only* indicating that no one else could do it. In example (27), *only* is used to convey negative evaluation. The reviewer is disappointed over the insufficient worldbuilding in the novel and *only* indicates that something more should have been present.

The word *lack* itself has negative connotation that something is missing. Example (28) shows how the book is compared to an expectation that is not reached (emphasis added).

(28) [...] the storyline which, is in itself well told but **lacks** real personality.
(*Goodreads*, 2.2)

With the use of *lack* in example (28), the reviewer presents an aspect of the book that is missing. Here the comparison is made against a storyline that has personality. The words *just* and *nearly* are used in similar context in examples (29) and (30) (emphasis added).

(29) The first half of the book was **just** ok
(*Goodreads*, 8.2)

(30) [...] the suspense is **nearly** unbearable.
(*Goodreads*, 3.1)

The reviewer thinks that the book is "just ok" in example (29), which in this case is interpreted as not that great. The use of *just* shows that, though the book was "ok", it should have been something more. In example (30), the reviewer describes the suspense in the book, which is good because it is almost "unbearable" compared to completely intolerable.

Comparative adverbs and adjectives are inherently comparative and they could be found in the reviews, which includes instances of *most*, *more* and *greatest*, for example. Examples (31) and (32) show couple occasions from the data.

(31) Another problem, which becomes more troubling as the novel unfolds
(*The Guardian*, 5)

(32) the single best description of the oncreep of love i have ever read
(*Goodreads*, 10.1)

In example (31), the reviewer writes about a problem in the book which presence is "more troubling" as the story goes on. This means that the problem is not that noticeable at the beginning but it becomes a problem towards the end. In turn, example (32) praises the description is the book as "the single best". Here the writing is again contrasted with other works of fiction but the works are not named.

Expressions of negativity also have comparative function as they are contrasting what is not present like in the following examples "The plot never stalls" (*The New York Times*, 7), "unoriginal dialogue" (*Goodreads*, 11.2) and "these disclosures still feel [...] unnatural" (*The New York Times*, 8). In the first of these three excerpts, it is positive that the plot is kept moving all the time. In contrast, the other two excerpts indicate that something is not great, the dialogue should be original and the disclosures should feel natural. Overall, comparison is used to a great extent in online book reviews and particularly by professional reviewers.

4.3.2. *Subjectivity and addressing the reader*

A clear marker of subjectivity is the use of the first-person pronoun in the evaluative passages. In the professional reviews, the first-person pronoun was used with evaluation in three reviews that is 25% of the total number. All of these three reviews were published in *The New York Times*. In contrast, the first-person pronoun featured in forty out of the forty-eight non-

professional reviews, which is 83 % of the total number. As the numbers show, the first-person pronoun was used more in the non-professional reviews. The next examples are from *The New York Times*.

(33) I read “The Institute” quickly and painlessly and I tried to enjoy myself. That I didn’t is partly a matter of temperament.
(The New York Times, 7)

(34) [...] in a surreal penultimate scene that seemed the only misstep in this majestic novel. I forgave it
(The New York Times, 9)

(35) Good Lord, I can’t believe how good this book is.
(The New York Times, 10)

In example (33), the reviewer explains the reading experience but even though quick and painless could be positive attributes, here they are not. The first-person pronoun *I* is used multiple times emphasising the subjectivity of the experience. Examples (34) and (35) are positive ones. The pronoun *I* is similarly used to recount the reading experience. In example (34), the reviewer presents a one "misstep" in the book but right after states that it did not matter that much. In turn, example (35) praises the book and the language reminds of non-professional reviews in the excitement with the used of "Good Lord" and the prominent presence of first-person pronouns throughout the entire review.

At times, the readers need to figure out themselves whether the reviewer would recommend the book or not. Most of the time, it is not difficult, especially, in the case of the non-professional reviews which are mostly either positive or negative, and a number of times they explicitly state the recommendation. This feature was only present in the non-professional reviews analysed like in the following example: "I would highly recommend this" (*LibraryThing*, 1.1). As the example shows, the recommendation is usually emphasised with an adverb "highly".

In the non-professional reviews on many occasions, the first-person pronoun was followed by verbs *like* and *love*, which show a positive attitude towards their object. In example (36) the verb *like* is used.

(36) I wanted to like it so much more than I did!
(*LibraryThing*, 2.1)

The example (33) is not an entirely positive one as the reviewer says that their expectations for the book were not reached. More typical used of the verb *like* in subjective construction would

be "I really liked the book" (*LibraryThing*, 12.2). Even more emotion is expressed with the verb *love* in examples (37) and (38).

(37) I loved pretty much everything about the book
(*Goodreads*, 1.1)

(38) I love anything she writes.
(*Goodreads*, 3.2)

In examples (34) and (35), the reviewers used *love* to express how they felt about the book. The verb shows strong emotion and was absent from the professional reviews. Compared to examples (29)–(31) taken from professional reviews, non-professional reviewers show more explicitly their personal opinions.

In Table 4, all the verbs used with the first-person pronoun *I* are listed. As I noted before, there were more occasions in the non-professional reviews that the pronoun *I* was used. The number of non-professional reviews in the data is higher, which also affects the difference in the number of verbs in Table 4.

Table 4. List of verbs used with the first person pronoun *I*.

Professional reviews	Non-professional reviews
am, began, believe, can, care, counted, discovered, do, enjoy, forgave, have, know, liked, loved, read, thought, tried, was, would	admit, am, appreciate, asked, became, began, believe, can, care, could, cried, cringed, did, disagree, dragged, ended, enjoyed, expected, explain, feel, finished, found, get, gravitate, gripped, guess, had, have, hope, imagine, keep, know, like, liked, listened, look, love, loved, mean, mention, might, must, need, pre-ordered, rated, read, realise, recommend, review, rounded, said, say, see, shall, should, spent, think, thought, visualize, want, wanted, was, will, would

Overall, the pronoun *I* was found in five out of the twelve professional reviews but it was not part of an evaluative passage in two of these occasions. In the professional reviews, the first-person pronoun *I* was most often used in context of "I am", "I have", "I was" and "I read". There were two occasions where emotive verbs were used with the pronoun *I*: "I especially liked the scene" and "[...] the reasons I loved (love?) him" (*The New York Times*, 7). The pronoun *I* was part of an evaluative context in all the non-professional reviews it was used. There were

multiple of instances of constructions "I enjoyed", "I liked" and "I loved" (see examples (37–38)). Table 4 shows that the non-professional reviewers also expressed more frequently how they felt or some specific physical reactions they had while reading, for instance, "I cried" and "I cringed".

The non-professional reviewers used the first-person singular pronoun more often in evaluative passages compared to professional reviewers. Overall, the reviews on *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* are more subjective and feature more sentences that include *I, me* or *my*. The possessive first-person pronoun was used in two professional reviews, which were in contexts of "my own novel", "under my desk" and "grown out of my interest". None of the examples were used in passages evaluating the book. In comparison, the possessive first-person pronoun was present in sixteen out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews. They were present in evaluative contexts like "in my opinion", "my favourite" or "my main problem". It can be seen that the first person possessive is used in more evaluative context compared to the few examples present in the professional reviews. The phrase "in my opinion" is linked with evaluative passage and emphasises the subjectivity of the sentence. The word "favourite" expresses positive evaluation and "problem" has negative connotations.

The use of first-person plural and second-person pronouns *we, us* and *you* were also examined in the passages where the reviewers are addressing the readers. Overall, eight out of the twelve professional reviewers address the reader (67%), and half of the professional reviews use inclusive *we* to build common ground with the readers. The phrase "we know" is the most used and the reviewers use it to allude that they all are thinking the same. In the case of *you*, five out of the twelve professional reviews used it to address the readers. While addressing the reader through *you*, the reviewers use verbs describing reactions, for example "you can taste" (*The New York Times*, 12), "you can't help but applaud" (*The Guardian*, 4) and "You may start to feel" (*The New York Times*, 7). In the professional reviews, the objective cases *me* and *us* are often present in evaluative passages such as "drove me crazy with jealousy" (*The New York Times*, 10) and "using her chillingly profound imagination to challenge us to think" (*The Guardian*, 5). However, there was not many occasions in the professional reviews where *me* or *us* were used, twenty-two in total.

Twenty out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews address the reader, which is a bit under half of the reviews (42%). This is less compared to the use of address in the professional reviews. In fourteen out of the forty-eight non-professional reviews, the inclusive *we* was used. The first-person plural is mostly present as way for reviewers to present what happens in the

books, for instance, "We get to know their daily routines" (*LibraryThing*, 6.1), but it is present also in evaluative structures like following:

- (39) Daisy is intolerable, both for her backstory and her impossibly selflessly perfect nature; we're unsurprised at her actions
(*LibraryThing*, 5.2)

In example (39), the reviewer presents negative opinions of the characters and by using the inclusive *we*, the reviewer tries to persuade the reader that they would feel the same. In addition, eleven non-professional reviews addressed the readers with the second-person pronoun. This means that they are used quite similarly in both professional and non-professional reviews. However, the context of the pronouns varies a bit. The most common context for *you* in non-professional reviews was with an *if*-construction like in the examples of the instructive element of book reviews (see examples (13) and (14)).

The readers can also be addressed with questions. In professional reviews, over half of them, seven out of twelve (58 %), featured questions. Compared to the professional reviews, the non-professional reviews had questions in seven out of the forty-eight reviews (12 %). In two out of those seven occasions, the question marks were used to emphasis confusion. The reviewers use questions as a rhetorical device, as there is no opportunity for readers to answer the questions, so the questions are used as a way to structure the review. Some of the questions were left open for an answer, in which case the reviewer wants the reader to consider what they think or to find out what the book will tell like in examples (40) and (41).

- (40) Rarely are [women] depicted as warriors. Is that a profound truth or a blind spot?
(*The New York Times*, 9)

- (41) Atwood has always said that "knowledge is power", but will Aunt Lydia use her power for good or evil?
(*The Guardian*, 5)

In example (40), the reviewer writes about the topic of the book and how women have been portrayed in books about wars. The reader is asked to think whether it reflects the reality or is it something that just usually happens in books. These philosophical questions were common way to include questions in the professional and the non-professional reviews. Example (41) is more directly linked to the plot of the book, as it is likely that after reading the book, the reader will know the answer to the question. One function for it is to intrigue the reader. The questions were present also for evaluative means. In the following passage the question is answered by the reviewer in the text.

(42) Sound thrilling? It certainly might be, but it isn't.
(*The New York Times*, 12)

The reviewer, in example (42), has described the book and then asks the reader "Sound thrilling?", assuming the reader has a positive expectation for the book. However, the answer which is provided by the reviewer is not a positive one stating that the book does not reach its potential. In non-professional reviews, questions were used to show confusion like in example (43).

(43) What publishers and editors read this book and agreed to print it??
(*Goodreads*, 12.1)

In example (43), the reviewer has used two question marks to emphasise the feeling. This question is a rhetorical one and shows the reader clearly what the reviewer thinks about the book implying that the book should not have been printed. As the examples indicate, some of the questions are used also as an evaluative strategy. Both professional and non-professional reviewers used questions in the evaluation and most of the time in a negative way like in examples (42) and (43). One of the non-professional reviews had a question that was present in a positively evaluating passage.

4.3.3. *Value-laden expressions*

This section has been divided into two parts. First, I will present examples that include words that are usually used in an evaluative environment. I analysed which kind of attributes the book, the plot, the writing and the author are given by the professional and non-professional reviewers. These categories were chosen on the basis of Table 2 as they are the features that are mostly evaluated in the online book reviews. Second, I will show examples that are evaluative in goal-achievement, where something is good if a goal intended is reached.

The words attributing *novel* and *book* were analysed and some differences were found between professional and the non-professional reviews. Only six times in the twelve professional reviews, the words *book* or *novel* had an evaluative attribute, for instance, "compelling" and "propulsive". The attributes in the professional reviews were mostly describing the books as "first", "debut" or "new". The non-professional reviews included more value-laden attributes for *book* and *novel*, twice as much the professional reviews. The number of attributes was contrasted to the number of times *book* and *novel* featured in the professional and non-professional reviews in total. Next examples are from the non-professional reviews.

(44) A truly remarkable first novel
(*Goodreads*, 8.1)

(45) **This novel is terrible**
(*Goodreads*, 5.1)

In example (44), the novel is modified with "remarkable" which has positive connotations and it is further emphasised with "truly". The novel is also described as the first novel by the author. This description was less common in the non-professional reviews compared to the professional reviews. Even though most of the books were evaluated positively, some negative reviews were found in the data as example (45) shows. In example (45), the adjective "terrible" is used to describe the novel. In addition, the reviewer has bolded this sentence so that the passage would stand out from the rest of the texts giving more emphasis for the negative point of view. In total, four non-professional reviews had bolded letters in the text in order to highlight certain passages of the review.

In order to look at the attributes given for the plot, I examined the words *plot*, *story* and *narrative*. Again, the non-professional reviews featured more evaluative attributes in contrast to the professional reviews. Examples of these occasions are, for instance, "an irresistible narrative" (*The Guardian*, 1) and "a thought-provoking and intelligent story" (*LibraryThing*, 6.1). In the category of writing, the words *writing*, *dialogue* and *characters* were included. Similarly, non-professional reviewers directly evaluate the writing (38% of the occurrences) in the books more compared to professional reviewers (8% of the occurrences). The non-professional reviewers are evaluating the writing both positively and negatively. The writing is described, for example as "beautiful", "wonderful" and "unoriginal".

To analyse how the writers are evaluated, I included the names of the authors and the words *author*, *writer* and *novelist*. This category of value-laden attributes did not result in any findings in the case of the professional reviews. In examples (46) and (47), the writer is complimented in non-professional reviews.

(46) Mengiste is a truly gifted novelist
(*Goodreads*, 9.1)

(47) It's a great book by an impressive writer.
(*LibraryThing*, 3.2)

The adjectives "gifted" and "impressive" have positive connotations, and it is clear that the reviewers positively evaluate the writers. In example (46), the adjective further emphasised with "truly", and in the example (47), the book is also evaluated as "great". The examples

regarding the different aspects of the books show that the non-professional reviewers are more direct in the evaluation compared to the professional reviewers.

In the data, the three most frequent adverbs used to give emphasis were *so*, *very* and *really*. The adverb *so* was used in twenty-two non-professional reviews (46%) compared to professional reviews where the adverb was present in four reviews (33%). Almost half of the non-professional reviewers used *so* as an adverbial when one third professional reviewers used it in the reviews. The most common contexts were "so much" and "so many" where *so* precedes another adverb. The other two frequently used adverbs used to give emphasis were *very* and *really*. The adverb *very* was present in fifteen (31%) non-professional reviews and *really* in sixteen (33%). In contrast, *very* was used in six (50%) professional reviews and *really* in four (33%). These numbers indicate that there was not many differences between professional and non-professional writers in this aspect.

At times, the evaluation is not as clear or direct as in examples (46)–(47), and sometimes the evaluation was presented in a goal-achieving manner. The following examples are instances of goal-achieving evaluation. Examples (48) and (49) are positive passages from the reviews.

(48) I'll definitely keep an eye out for more from Jessie Burton.
(*LibraryThing*, 2.2)

(49) I can't wait to see the direction Darren Matthews will follow
(*Goodreads*, 3.1)

The reviewers, in examples (48) and (49), indicate that based on the book they have read, they could read more books by the author. They use the first-person pronoun *I* with future tense to tell what they are planning to do based on the reading experience. This is what writers want, to grab the attention of readers and have them anticipating new books or read their other books already published. The phrase *keep an eye out for* is included in couple of the reviews like in example (48). Examples (48) and (49) show what the reviewers will do but, in examples (50) and (51), the reviewers write about the reading experience itself.

(50) [...] i couldn't read it fast enough
(*Goodreads*, 10.1)

(51) The right writer can convince me to stick around. King kept me marginally on the hook.
(*The New York Times*, 7)

In both examples, the reviewers write about how the books kept them hooked. The reviewer, in example (50), wanted to read the book fast as they wanted to know what will happen. The choice to use the expressions "couldn't" and "fast enough" intensify the feeling compared to a

phrase *I read it fast*. Example (51) is not as positive stating that the book kept them "marginally on the hook", compared to example (50) where the writer could not put the book down. The verb *convince* is used to by the reviewer and that is essential for the authors, to convince that the book is worth reading. The goal of keeping readers interested is not quite achieved in examples (52) and (53).

(52) I didn't always find myself as completely absorbed by it as I expected and not as emotionally invested in the characters as I thought I would be.
(*LibraryThing*, 6.2)

(53) [...] once I realized there was no plot and everything that happened was just a series of events, I began to lose interest. [...] I honestly thought about not finishing it.
(*Goodreads*, 12.1)

In examples (52) and (53), the authors did not keep the writers interested in the stories as they could have, and thus failed to achieve the intended goal. The reviewer is not as negative in example (52) as they could be towards the book. The reviewer states that the expectations were not reached but the use of "didn't always" and "as" imply that there were times when the review was "absorbed" by the book. In example (53) the reviewer directly states that they lost interest in the book even though they finished it. In examples (54) and (55), the reviewers express frustration.

(54) I'll only get yelled at if I say more so that's it.
(*LibraryThing*, 5.2)

(55) I guess I'll have to be the one who says what nobody else is willing to say.
(*Goodreads*, 5.1)

Example (54) is from the end of the review that is not giving high praise for the book in question. Because being yelled at is not a position people usually want to be, the reader can interpret that it is something to avoid. The reviewer is assuming that their opinion will not be appreciated as it is negative one and decides to keep some of their opinions to themselves. In example (55), the reviewer is telling the audience that the following is something negative with the used of "have to" and "nobody else is willing". This implies that they will say something others do not want to say aloud. One goal for authors is to arise emotion in the readers which is present in the following examples (56) and (57).

(56) This novel made me feel pity and fear, and more times than is reasonable, gave me goose bumps.
(*The New York Times*, 9)

(57) Now I'm just going to list some phrases that drove me crazy with jealousy
(*The New York Times*, 10)

Here, in both examples, the reviewers positively evaluate the books even though the emotions the reviewers have felt can be positive or negative ones. In example (56), the reviewer felt "pity and fear", which is good as they were able to empathise with the characters in the book. In addition, the book gave them a physical reaction, getting goose bumps is a good reaction. The reviewer is talking about jealousy in example (57), which in itself might not be a positive feeling. However, being jealous over how well a book is written shows positive evaluation of the author. As the above examples show, evaluation is present in book reviews to a great extent. Regarding the differences between professional and non-professional reviews in the use of value-laden expressions, there is not any clear divide, although, in the non-professional reviews, the evaluative attributes are more direct. In the case of the goal-achieving evaluation, a number of goals were identified. It is important that the book keeps the reader's attention throughout the story, and it is positive if the book is able to evoke feelings in the reader.

5. Discussion

The results show that differences between professional and non-professional online book reviews can be found in how they are constructed and in the evaluative strategies they use. The distinction of professional and non-professional reviews was made based on where the reviews are published, and for the purposes of this study it was an appropriate way to divide the reviews. The different online platforms were part of the reason why variation was found between the professional and the non-professional reviewers. However, Pool (2007: 37) argues that in between these two groups of reviewers there are reviewers who contribute to websites, like *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing*, with a great number of reviews. They may not be paid but they are encouraged by publishers to create discussion around certain books. It is common for publishers to send early copies of books to a group of people who then can share their opinions on them already before the book is out for the general public. This was present in the data as the analysis of different stages of the online book reviews showed. Because the reviewers receive a free copy of the book, they can also be felt obligated to write a good review but the ten reviews which state that the book was send to them do not stand out from the non-professional reviews as more positive. This pressure to write a good review for a book can be felt also by the professional reviewers (Pool, 2007: 88). The focus of the current study was not on how truthful the reviewers are in the reviews but rather on which elements are included in the reviews and how the evaluation is present. However, the use of first-person singular pronouns is proposed to be an indication of truthfulness as the reviewers own their opinions (Hajibayova, 2019: 619). The use of *I* was more frequent among the non-professional reviewers, and in two professional reviews it was applied very often, so it can be assumed that the writers were presenting their opinions in a truthful manner.

The context of online book reviews is framed to a particular section on a newspaper site in the case of professional reviews and the book reviews have also their own place on the user-generated websites. Even though both are published on online platforms, the difference is clear between professional and non-professional reviews. Due to the variation in the interactional features between professional and non-professional book reviews, differences also emerge in the discourse communities they form. The discourse community of professional online book reviewers is smaller and more restricted in members but within the members there can also be hierarchy as some critics' opinions are valued more (Hajibayova, 2019: 612). In the discourse community, the genre of book reviews is utilised as a way to share information of the books for a broad audience. Among the non-professional reviewers, book reviews function as a way to

share one's opinions and describe the reading experience with less focus on the actual content of the books compared to the professional reviews.

The results support the indication that professional book reviews include more information than non-professional reviews because there is more variation among the non-professional reviews (see Table 2). Some description of the book can be found in almost every review, however for non-professional reviews it is not absolutely mandatory. Many of the professional reviews give detailed description of the book leaving very little for the reader to discover compared to the non-professional reviews that tend to be less detailed about the plot. The reason for the inconsistent amount of description in the non-professional reviews on *Goodreads* and *LibraryThings* can be caused by the description of the book on the webpages where the reviews are posted. The presence of description in online book reviews is consistent with a study on the quality of book reviews, where traditional book reviews were compared to user-generated reviews on *Amazon*. By focusing on the content of the reviews, Sich (2017: 93) claims that the traditional sources of book reviews, for instance newspapers, are better for library acquisitions because they have more information of the books. The results of the present study do indicate that professional reviews have consistently more information of the books compared to non-professional reviews. However, even though the professional reviews feature more information about the content of the book, the non-professional reviews indicate what people think about the book in general. The user-generated websites like *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing* represent the thoughts of a great number of people on a great number of books. This could be important information for library acquisitions in order to find out which books people are interested in and which are liked, as the opinions of consumers and critics might vary a lot at times. Consequently, Sich (2017: 93) notes that couple of the books reviewed had different ratings among traditional sources and amateur sources. In the data of the present study, the professional and the non-professional reviewers were mostly in consensus on how they felt about the books.

The results of the analysis show that non-professional reviewers write about the author in the reviews less than professional reviewers (see Table 2). In both the descriptive and the evaluative stage, the professional reviewers write about other authors and texts more compared to the non-professional reviewers. In the descriptive stage, this included information of the author of the book reviewed. This supports the claims that professional reviews are more informative. Contrasting the book to other works was also used as an evaluative device. Comparison to other works and authors was used more by the professional reviewers for newspapers. One reason for this could be that the reviewers are showing their awareness in the field of literature. The reviewers compare the book reviewed to the author's other works for the

benefit of the reader in case they have already read books by the same author. This feature might have been even more common if the data did not have reviews on debut novels. Using comparison in the reviews is considered to be helpful by the consumers. Skalicky (2013: 89) examined consumer reviews of household products but it could be also helpful for readers of books that the reviewers include mentions of other similar books in the reviews. Linguistically there were no differences between the professional and the non-professional reviewers in the way comparison to other works was expressed. In a study of online movie reviews, the comparison of the movie to another specific movie was more frequent among non-professional consumer reviews (de Jong, 2013: 79). Among the online book reviews analysed in this study, it was more common for the professional reviews to include other titles in the reviews.

As has been noted, online book reviews have two distinctive stages, which are description and evaluation. These stages were also present in amateur online movie reviews as Taboada (2011) proposes. These two review genres have differences on what is described due to the different topics but similarities can also be found. Taboada (2011: 252, 257, 258) notes that in the data of movie reviews, evaluation was present in all the reviews. These findings correspond with the results of the online book reviews, and further support the notion that evaluation is the main component of non-professional online book reviews. Regarding the structure of online movie reviews, Taboada shows that, though evaluation can be found throughout the review, the end of the review is only reserved for evaluation. The analysis of the structure of online book reviews shows that evaluation is usually found at the end among the non-professional reviews but this did not correlate as strongly to the professional reviews. The reviews have two very distinctive stages but, in addition to the evaluative and the descriptive stages, there can be found parts of the text that do not clearly belong to either of the two stages. Shrum (1991: 352) noted that reviews of performing arts have three additional elements in them: analytic, instruction and entertainment. These three elements were found in the data but they were not mandatory elements of online book reviews.

The analysis showed that the professional reviewers frequently use quotes from the books. They are used as a support for arguments and to showcase the writing style of the book in addition to describing it. The reviewers also want to show that they have carefully read the book and are able to pick up quotes to use in the review, which is the reason that quotes are used more in the professional reviews. The use of quotes was proposed to be a characteristic for news language (Cotter, 2010: 27), so it could be argued that the frequent use of quotes in professional book reviews derives from the context of newspapers. The professional reviews included a number of links in the text, which is possible as the reviews are published on online

sites but they are also a feature of news articles. Only couple of the non-professional reviews had links in the reviews. The links provide more information for the readers in case they are interested, and they also keep the readers on the website longer as, at least in the case of the professional reviews, the links directed to other pages on the website.

The promotional feature of newspaper reviews is present in the little advertisements of the reviewers at the end of reviews, where instructions on how to purchase the book were also present. The professional reviews have a promotional stage in the text, which does not apply to *Goodreads* and *LibraryThing*, where the book pages only have links to other sites to purchase the book. Bhatia (2005: 223) proposes that the reviews have become more promotional and the findings the present study support this claim. In addition to the straightforward promotional stage, the reviews on newspaper sites are not very negative, and when something less positive is included in the review, it is balanced with positive comments. The non-professional reviewers are more direct in expressing negative and positive evaluation.

One of the predictions that I had for the ways of how professional and non-professional reviews differ from one another was the distinction between formal and informal language. However, the results show that the professional and the non-professional reviews do not have major variation in the formality of the language. Both professional and non-professional reviewers used abbreviated syntax and idiomatic expressions, which are characteristic for informal texts (Kolata, 2010: 51). References to the writer is among the features noted by Kolata. In the present study, the non-professional reviews had more references to the writer by using the first-person pronoun, they included attitudinal language and everyday vocabulary, which are also considered to be informal features (Kolata, 2010: 52). In the material, the professional reviews contained more formal language compared to the non-professional reviews as they included the first-person pronouns less frequently and they had more references to other texts. The professional reviews are published in the entertainment sections of newspapers, which does not require as formal language as some more serious news articles.

The expressions of *I like* and *I love* are part of a more informal discourse, which is the reason they are not frequently used in newspaper reviews. The professional reviewers do not show as much emotion compared to the non-professional reviewers. Even though the main function of reviews is to evaluate, it is clear that personal taste can vary. The professional reviewers try to present a more rational and educated viewpoint by not writing as much of their own reading experiences but keeping the book at the centre of the attention. Findings on a study of online movie reviews also indicates that professional reviews are less evaluative compared to non-professional reviews (de Jong, 2013: 78). Because the non-professional book reviews

featured more instances of how the reviewer felt about the book, there are number of reviews where the reading experience of the reviewer is the main point of the review. This is one strategy to evaluate a book, as presenting how you felt during the reading experience might persuade others to read or not to read a certain book. It was found in the analysis that the non-professional reviewers also directly recommend the book to the readers by using the verb *recommend*. According to de Jong (2013: 79), non-professional online movie reviewers were also more direct in the recommendation compared to professional critics.

The frequent inclusion of the first-person pronoun was proposed to be a feature of an author-based review because the author is at the centre of the focus (Skalicky, 2013: 86). However, not all of the non-professional book reviews that used the first-person pronoun can be considered to be author-based reviews. Some of these reviews do focus more on the book itself rather than the personal experience. All of the professional book reviews can be considered to be product-based reviews as they focus on the book. Some of the professional reviews do include first-person pronouns but the overall spotlight is on the book. The third review category proposed by Skalicky is the reader-based reviews. As the results show, the readers are addressed in both the professional and the non-professional reviews but none of the reviews analysed were mostly centred around the reader. The results show that the professional reviewers address the readers with personal pronouns and questions in order to form a relationship with the readers and to construct the review. In de Jong's (2013: 79) study, it was found that professional movie critics do not address the readers as much as non-professional reviewers. In the present study of online book reviews, the professional reviewers do address the readers and, especially, the first-person plural *we* was used more by the professional reviewers than the non-professionals.

Differences between the professional and the non-professional reviews in their evaluative strategies can be found in comparison and subjectivity. The non-professionals show their stance more directly, and the professional reviewers use comparison as an evaluative device more often in contrast to the non-professional reviewers. The third feature of the evaluative language examined in this study was value-laden expressions. In general, as evaluation is vital part of the online book reviews, the language includes many value-laden expressions in both the professional and the non-professional reviews. Part of the value-laden expressions are the goal-achieving functions, and number of goals were identified as important in the book reviews. The aspects of evaluative language were based on the work by Thompson and Hunston (2000: 13, 22–24), who also propose parameters for evaluation, which includes a positive-negative parameter. From the results, it is clear that the intuitive assumption that book reviews fall to the

group of positive-negative is correct. The reviews are situated in the positive-negative spectrum evaluating the books mostly in a positive manner.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to show how online book reviews are constructed and to examine the evaluative language present in them. In the analysis, two essential parts of the reviews were identified, a descriptive and an evaluative stage. Differences between the professional and the non-professional reviews were found regarding how the books and the authors were described and evaluated. In general, the professional reviews included more information on the books. Some differences between the professional and the non-professional reviews were present due to the differences of the online platforms. However, the results show that the two groups of reviewers also use different linguistic devices to express their opinions on the books.

The evaluative language in online book reviews was analysed from three aspects: how comparison was used, how subjectivity was present and which kind of value-laden expressions were utilised in the evaluation. The results showed that the non-professional reviewers express themselves in a more subjective manner compared to the professional reviewers. The non-professional reviewers express their own experiences and feelings in the reviews compared to the professional reviews where the book is more in focus, though it is not unprecedented for the professional reviewers to express their feelings towards the books in a subjective manner. The professional reviewers use more comparison in order to express positive or negative evaluation compared to the non-professional reviewers. The reviews included many value-laden expressions as the purpose of the reviews is to show whether the book is good or not. The analysis of value-laden expressions also revealed a number of goals that are considered to be positive for the books, for example, the books need to hold the readers attention and they should arise emotions in the readers.

My data included a small sample of reviews found online, therefore the results can only indicate preliminary results and tendencies within the genre of online book reviews and differences between professional and non-professional reviewers. Further studies could be conducted with more data especially to see if the evaluative differences can be seen in larger data in the case of comparison as comparison was clearly more common among the professional reviewers in the present study. Also, a closer analysis of the different adverbs used in professional and non-professional book reviews could be conducted. Studies of evaluative language reveal how the writers express themselves and convey their opinions as well as show what kind of evaluation is appropriate in particular contexts.

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Appendix

The professional reviews

The Guardian

1.	Lowry, E. 2019. 'The Dutch House by Ann Patchett review – an irresistible modern fairytale', 25 September. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/25/dutch-house-ann-patchett-review
2.	Hickling, H. 2019. 'The Confession by Jessie Burton review – an understated triumph', 21 September. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/21/the-confession-by-jessie-burton-review
3.	Collins, S, 2019. 'Heaven, My Home by Attica Locke review – compelling Texas noir', 20 September. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/20/heaven-my-home-by-attica-locke-review
4.	Cummins, A. 2019. 'Girl by Edna O'Brien review – painful, bold and challenging', 16 September. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/16/girl-edna-obrien-review-boko-haram
5.	Myerson, J. 2019. 'The Testaments by Margaret Atwood review – hints of a happy ending', 15 September. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/15/the-testaments-margaret-atwood-review
6.	Hudson, K. 2019. 'Nightingale Point by Luan Goldie review – a compelling debut novel', 30 August. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/30/nightingale-point-luan-goldie-review

The New York Times

7.	Garner, D. 2019. 'Stephen King Visits an "Institute," Where the Kids Who Enter Can't Escape', 8 September. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/08/books/review-institute-stephen-king.html
8.	Edugyan, E. 2019, 'Ta-Nehesi Coates's Debut Novel Mingles History and Fantasy', 24 September. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/24/books/review/water-dancer-ta-nehisi-coates.html
9.	Serpell, N. 2019. 'Maaza Mengiste Sings a Modern Song of War', 26 September. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/26/books/review/maaza-mengiste-the-shadow-king.html
10.	Brodesser-Akner, T. 2019. 'In Kevin Wilson's New Novel, Rageaholic Twins Spontaneously Combust', 29 October. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/29/books/review/nothing-to-see-here-kevin-wilson.html
11.	Finder, J. 2019. 'Imagining the World of Nazi Hunters', 25 October. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/books/review/the-accomplice-joseph-kanon.html
12.	Faye, L. 2019. '8 Years After "The Night Circus," Erin Morgenstern Has a New Novel', 25 October. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/books/review/starless-sea-erin-morgenstern.html

The non-professional reviews

Goodreads

1.1	Angela M 2019. <i>Angela M's review of The Dutch House</i> , 30 June. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2832487682?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
1.2	Flo 2019, <i>Flo's review of The Dutch House</i> , 21 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3057184623?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
2.1	Paromjit 2019. <i>Paromjit (The United Kingdom)'s review of The Confession</i> , 27 August. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2953739706?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
2.2	Marie (UK) 2019. <i>Marie (UK)'a review of The Confession</i> , 22 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2942269025?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
3.1	Julie 2019. <i>Julie's review of Heaven, My Home</i> , 9 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2800336907?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
3.2	Peacejanz 2019. <i>Peacejanz's review of Heaven, My Home</i> , 19 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3054883635?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=2
4.1	Elyse Walter 2019. <i>Elyse Walter's review of Girl</i> , 9 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3034030565?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
4.2	Lindsay 2019. <i>Lindsay Wincherauk's review of Girl</i> , 21 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3056473407?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
5.1	Tatiana 2019. <i>Tatiana's review of The Testaments</i> , 28 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2608733195?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
5.2	Lindsay 2019. <i>Lindsay's review of The Testaments</i> , 23 November. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2989319583?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=2
6.1	Paromjit 2019. <i>Paromjit (The United Kingdoms)' review of Nightingale Point</i> . 12 July. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2893147398?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
6.2	Tanya Marlow 2019. <i>Tanya Marlow's review of Nightingale Point</i> . 21 December. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3094064335?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
7.1	Emily May 2019. <i>Emily May (The United Kigdom)'s review of The Institute</i> , 28 September. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2698399846?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
7.2	Michele Benson 2020. <i>Michele Benson's review of The Institute</i> , 18 January. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3138800469?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1

8.1	Diane S 2019. <i>Diane S (Batavia, IL)'s reviews of The Water Dancer</i> , 11 July. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2873298861?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
8.2	Kayla 2020. <i>Kayla (Zap, ND)'s review of The Water Dancer</i> , 18 January. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3091066425?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
9.1	Laura 2019. <i>Laura's review of The Shadow King</i> , 21 October. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2863037338?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
9.2	Jessie 2020. <i>Jessie's review of The Shadow King</i> , 17 January. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2766906283?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
10.1	karen 2019. <i>karen (Woodside, NY)'s review of Nothing to See Here</i> , 27 September. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2837138395?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
10.2	Jerrie (redwritinghood) 2020. <i>Jerrie (redwritinghood) (Guilford, CT)'s review of Nothing to See Here</i> , 18 January. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2963805404?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
11.1	Paige 2019, <i>Paige's review of The Accomplice</i> , 6 October. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3001252146?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
11.2	Katy Murray 2020. <i>Katy Murray's review of The Accomplice</i> , 18 January. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3148664300?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1
12.1	Lisa Lynch 2019. <i>Lisa Lynch's review of The Starless Sea</i> , 4 August. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2913818259?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1
12.2	Gabbie 2020. <i>Gabbie (Staten Island, NY)'s review of The Starless Sea</i> , 18 January. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3083473410?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=1

LibraryThing

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1.2	Donna828 2019. <i>Reviews: The Dutch House</i> . 9 October. https://www.librarything.com/work/23013230/reviews
2.1	pluckedhighbrow 2019. <i>Reviews: The Confession</i> , 10 November. https://www.librarything.com/work/23323802/reviews
2.2	Carpe_Librum 2019. <i>Reviews: The Confession</i> , 8 November. https://www.librarything.com/work/23323802/reviews
3.1	viviennestrauss 2019. <i>Reviews: Heaven, My Home</i> , 31 October. https://www.librarything.com/work/22786922/reviews
3.2	Tonstant.Weader 2019. <i>Reviews: Heaven, My Home</i> , 11 September. https://www.librarything.com/work/22786922/reviews
4.1	anzlitlovers 2019. <i>Reviews: Girl</i> , 19 October. https://www.librarything.com/work/23156475/reviews

4.2	avaland 2020. <i>Reviews: Girl</i> , 2 January. https://www.librarything.com/work/23156475/reviews
5.1	SheTreadsSoftly 2019. <i>Reviews: The Testaments</i> , 19 November. https://www.librarything.com/work/22568688/reviews
5.2	richardderus 2019. <i>Reviews: The Testaments</i> , 24 September. https://www.librarything.com/work/22568688/reviews
6.1	InnahLovesYou 2019. <i>Reviews: Nightingale Point</i> , 4 September. https://www.librarything.com/work/23426625/reviews
6.2	nicx27 2019. <i>Reviews: Nightingale Point</i> , 2 August. https://www.librarything.com/work/23426625/reviews
7.1	John_Warner 2020. <i>Reviews: The Institute</i> , 17 January. https://www.librarything.com/work/22854739/reviews
7.2	Bran_Pap 2019. <i>Reviews: The Institute</i> , 9 December. https://www.librarything.com/work/22854739/reviews
8.1	bblum 2020. <i>Reviews: The Water Dancer</i> , 9 January. https://www.librarything.com/work/22859734/reviews
8.2	g33kgrrl 2019. <i>Reviews: The Water Dancer</i> , 27 November. https://www.librarything.com/work/22859734/reviews
9.1	ghefferon 2020. <i>Reviews: The Shadow King</i> , 6 January. https://www.librarything.com/work/23294686/reviews
9.2	janerawoof 2019. <i>Reviews: The Shadow King</i> , 17 November. https://www.librarything.com/work/23294686/reviews
10.1	alanna1122 2020. <i>Review: Nothing to See Here</i> , 12 January. https://www.librarything.com/work/23222166/reviews
10.2	Hccpsk 2019. <i>Review: Nothing to See Here</i> , 1 December. https://www.librarything.com/work/23222166/reviews
10.3	joyblue 2019. <i>Review: Nothing to See Here</i> , 18 December. https://www.librarything.com/work/23222166/reviews
11.1	techeditor 2019. <i>Review: The Accomplice</i> , 11 October. https://www.librarything.com/work/23254148/reviews
12.1	bookczuk 2020. <i>Reviews: The Starless Sea</i> , 18 January. https://www.librarything.com/work/22497127/reviews
12.2	kimkimkim 2019. <i>Reviews: The Starless Sea</i> , 25 November. https://www.librarything.com/work/22497127/reviews