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ACADEMIC BOOK REVIEWS: WHO'S WRITING AND CITING WHAT IN LINGUISTICS?

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Abstract: *From narrating to informing to evaluating, academic book reviews are an important contribution to the scholarly world. While the review of a book written for popular consumption can impact its success, the academic book review enables authors and readers to engage in a dialogue concerning the merits of a given work and areas for improvement or expansion through subsequent research. This paper explores over four-thousand book reviews published over an almost thirty-year period on The LINGUIST List, recognizing the reviewing 'landscape,' the reviewers' qualifications, the temporal distance between publication of the book and its review, and the usage of external references.*

Key words: *linguistics, book reviews, bibliometrics, corpus study, quantitative research*

1. Introduction

Although academic book reviews are incredibly important to “the manufacture of knowledge and the social cohesiveness of disciplinary communities” (Hyland & Diani 2009:1), they are not assigned the same ‘weight’ as other types of publications, such as academic articles, books, and book chapters. This is reflected both structurally and procedurally, as book reviews tend to be quite short in length and are not always subjected to the same level of peer review expected by other publications. Furthermore, conventional narratives suggest that book reviews are infrequently written by accomplished scholars but, rather, by those with lesser degrees of education and experience (cf. Casanave & Li 2023), as the admittedly institution-specific requirements for tenure and promotion at colleges and universities rarely admit book reviews for consideration, relegating them to placement within service obligations.

Despite this, the academic book review presents, at least hypothetically, a significant opportunity for dialogue to take place between and among specialists in the field (cf. Stepanov 2016), resulting in a work that is in some ways simultaneously adjacent to but ultimately wholly dependent upon the existence of the original publication in its attempt at “bringing about a (tacit) feedback between [the reviewer] and the respective author and to familiarizing a more or less expert leadership with the achievements and failures of the work under review” (Wills 1997:136). Indeed, recent scholarship on the genre-specific conventions of the academic book review has outlined rhetorical and sociological factors impacting the resulting work. When combined with bibliometric research methods, which have traditionally emphasized the significance of particular scholarly outputs (e.g. the most widely cited articles), a formal treatment of the academic book review explains not only on the reception of such production, but also the level of preparation and experience of the author of the review.

For this reason, the present study focuses specifically upon academic book reviews written for and published by *the LINGUIST List* (hereafter LL), perhaps the most extensively consulted online repository of materials on and about linguistics. In considering over four-thousand (N=4,508) book reviews published over an almost thirty-year period (1995-2024), the present study

offers a metatextual commentary on the dialogic of the genre within the field. To this end, this article is organized into four additional parts. Section 2 offers an overview of existing scholarship on the book review as a genre and provides the historical context for the existence and importance of the LL. Section 3 describes the corpus of academic book reviews considered here and outlines the methodological approach undertaken. Section 4 presents a mixed-methods accounting of these data and contextualizes the reviews with recourse to the authors' backgrounds. Finally, section 5 discusses the contributions and limitations of the present study, offering areas for future research within this area.

2. Literature Review

2.1. History of and Scholarship on the *LINGUIST List*

While currently housed at Indiana University in the USA, the LL has humble origins in Perth, Australia, at the University of Western Australia. It was here that Anthony Rodrigues Aristar, with the support and assistance of his wife Helen (Aristar-)Dry, would begin a mailing list in 1990 on the then-burgeoning internet. Following Dry (1998:11), the first issue they shared was sent to sixty-nine subscribers, a far cry from the almost thirty-thousand subscribers and more than sixty-thousand followers on social media today. Despite multiple moves from one institution to another, the LL has become a significant repository of information connecting linguists (and those with an interest in linguistics, broadly construed) to vital information concerning publications, conferences, jobs, etc.

For instance, users have access to a dozen other resources, including notifications about published books and book reviews; a registry of journals, calls for papers, and tables of contents for released issues; abstracts from dissertations; job postings, announced conferences, summer educational opportunities; information for students, such as a definition of linguistics, a list of educational institutions that offer coursework in linguistics, and suggestions for academic writing in the field; an internal forum for discussions on all topics related to the field; and more. Such a vast array of information suggests that the LL has obtained a central role for scholars and students alike. Nevertheless, although it publishes book reviews regularly, something that academic journals also frequently do, and does have the necessary supports in-place to ensure the release of high-quality, verified information, the LL is not, strictly speaking, an academic journal. Instead, it is a large, robust, electronic repository of information connected to linguistics as a field of scholarly inquiry. This includes, of course, their own mailing lists (*LINGUIST* and *LINGLITE*) and another forty mailing lists covering topics as varied as *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* (CADAAD), the *Distributed Morphology List* (Dm-list), and the *Discussion List for Hmong-Mien/Miao-Yao Linguistics* (My-hm).

On the other hand, far less attention has been given to using the information available as a valuable *source* of data for analytical purposes. Indeed, most of the extant scholarship focuses on the procedural and pragmatic dimensions of the LL. While Borshchev (2008) provides a macro-level overview of the functionality of the repository and Ćavar et al. (2012) foreground the difficulties involved in maintaining such a large mailing list, the greatest area of interest addresses the pragmatically-informed rules and norms involved in voluntary, electronic participation (Kondash 1999, Maricic 2001, Odeneye 2014, Virtanen & Maricic 2000). Two such studies emphasize sociolinguistic topics of greater interest today than when they were originally published. For instance, Herring (1992) found that female correspondents were underrepresented both in participation and subscription, recognizing that women utilized a far less adversarial stance than their male counterparts, before ultimately concluding that female involvement might be expanded

through the adoption of more stereotypically male discursive patterns. Similarly, Rowe (2008) examines responses on the ‘Ask-a-Linguist’ bulletin board (from 1998-2003), recognizing the importance of one's role (initiator/respondent), intention, educational attainment, medium of communication, and (non-)native speaker status. Beyond these aforementioned studies, however, the potential for the LL to be recognized not only as a highly-organized tool, but also as a developing corpus, remains unrealized.

2.2. The ‘Book Review’ as a Genre and Publication

A significant body of literature exists concerning the book review as a publication in terms of its genre-specific conventions, its importance to scholarly discussions, and its procedural dimension. In fact, questions—sometimes explicit and sometimes tacit—have arisen as to *who* should be writing academic book reviews, *why* they should be written at particular stages of one's career, *why* they should or do not matter, *for whom* they are written in the first place, and *how* they should be written to ensure effective, critical engagement and reception. As Hyland and Diani (2009:2) explain, the format of contemporary book reviews—and other texts belonging to the review genre—shifted in the mid-seventeenth century, resulting in a critical turn that no longer simply reproduced substantial passages from the original publication. Unlike other review genres (e.g. the literature review and book ‘blurbs’), which serve to contextualize the resulting discussion and simply praise the work, respectively, a book review is decidedly evaluative in nature, striving to emphasize the strengths, limitations, and (in)accuracy of the findings presented. For this reason, Vassileva (2023:34-35) describes the (evaluative) review genre as a topic of wider scholarly interest as a relatively recent arrival, noting that linguists in the German-speaking world have considered the genre-specific conventions, purposeful nature, and the discursive manifestation of book reviews decades ago. It is the book review, following Stowe (1991:592), that enables one to “tell what is happening in our world, how well we are working and how we can reshape our work.”

In affirming their belief that book reviews are “a legitimate and important form of academic publishing,” Croco and Zarestky (2024) outline ten reasons encompassing personal and professional aspects, such as the acquisition of new, likely expensive books, improving critical reading and synthesis, developing interpersonal communication skills and relationships, providing a valuable service to the profession, and expanding one's own teaching and writing abilities. Additionally, many have either described or prescribed templatic heuristics and prerequisites for writing academic book reviews (e.g. Acharya et al. 2023, Demir 2019, Lewis 2022, Lee 2010, and Turicensis 1973 [1929]). Indeed, the book review has even arisen as a common assignment in graduate-level courses, such that Swales and Feak (2012) dedicate almost twenty pages of their *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills* to providing an overview and examples of and schema for engaging in this type of writing (cf. pp. 230-248). Others have argued that, should a book review be effectively written, it can serve as a valuable metric as to the acceptability of certain ideas and even reflect the state of the field (cf. Oinas & Leppälä 2013). As such, it might reasonably appear that the genre is a perceptually important one in which accomplished scholars engage regularly and dutifully.

It is unfortunate, then, that book reviews seemingly ‘count’ for everything and nothing at the same time: While they fulfill a necessary function in academic circles, they are infrequently treated as ‘real’ publications; thus, caution is often advised in undertaking them at the expense of other scholarship. Crocco and Zarestky (2024:1) also make a similar point in the very first sentence of their paper: “It is common in academia to hear that students and scholars should avoid writing book reviews.” In a popular book on academic writing, Belcher (2009:44) even goes one step

further in actually issuing the following guidance: “Never substitute writing book reviews for writing a research article.” Despite this, Hyland and Diani (2009:2-3) remarked that

[v]ery much a public discourse, reviews contribute to the dissemination and evaluation of research and offer a means by which junior academics can gain institutional credit and a publication profile and established writers a rhetorical platform. Here they can signal their allegiance to a particular orientation or group and proclaim a position.

Thus, the ‘book review’ may provide and signify a path by which to *enter* the world of academic publishing but is not necessarily a means by which to *gain* or *retain* employment and establish professional status. According to Sprink et al. (1998:365), this is the case because primarily publishers, librarians, and individual scholars have an interest in book reviews, while other parties are less overtly invested in the genre. Further commentary on the dialogic nature among these stakeholders can be found in Jaakkola (2022), Rowland et al. (2019), and Tse and Hyland (2006).

It seems, then, that the typical academic book review ‘counts,’ at best, for comparatively little to absolutely nothing; at worst, as an unnecessary placeholder on one’s *vita*e for what could have been a double-blind, peer-reviewed journal article. Evidence for this is found not only in (admittedly institution-specific) requirements for tenure and promotion and formal scholarship on such requirements (cf. Modern Language Association 2007, Seipel 2003, Oinas & Leppälä 2013, Shatz 2009), but also by popular consensus, as questions asked on *ResearchGate*, *Academia.edu*, *Academia Stack Exchange*, and *Reddit* regularly include variations of the following:

Is a book review considered a publication?
Does a book review in scholarly journals count as a publication?
What is your opinion on book reviews?
Are academic book reviews worth it?
Is it worth writing book reviews for academic journals?
Why do academics write/publish book reviews for journals?

More poignantly, Toor (2012) asks the reader directly, “And why should any faculty members, buried under their own work, bother to write [a book review]?” (para. 5). Such a line of questioning suggests, at the very least, that there is uncertainty around whether one’s efforts in undertaking a book review will amount to anything beyond the simple reception of a free book. On the other hand, positive reception of one’s published scholarship, whether in the form of glowing reviews or significant citations, does have the potential to impact one’s advancement in academia.

Despite opposition to *writing* them, academic book reviews constitute a unique genre that is informed by and reflects a variety of rhetorical modes, enabling them to be simultaneously narrative, informative, and evaluative. As a result, much of the extant research on the structure and purposes of book reviews arrives in one of three forms. The first evaluates the relative merit of book reviews in the first place. While authors like Shatz (2009) and Oinas and Leppälä (2013) consider the strengths and limitations of this scholarly output, some of these conversations have even taken place outside traditional academic publishing in online outlets like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *InsideHigherEd* (cf. Toor 2012 and Brienza 2015, respectively). The second considers the sociolinguistic dimension, often comparing and contrasting specific lexical and phrasal choices made by authors of reviews written in English and other languages, such as Moreno and Suárez (2009) for Spanish, Bal Gezegin (2015) for Turkish, Klaibanmai (2021) for Thai, and Vassileva (2023) for German. In instances where the analysis contains a corpus in a singular language, the focus tends to highlight the genre-specific conventions, investigating how narrowly or broadly the reviews exemplify the genre (cf. Motta-Roth 1995, Groom 2009, and Shaw 2009).

Finally, although often purely an idealization, the third approach foregrounds the more interdisciplinary decisions made concerning book reviews, such as by discussing the prerequisite qualifications of the authors and precisely the type of content that should or must be included to write a compelling, balanced, and effective review. While exemplars were provided earlier for this approach, one deserves special treatment (cf. Turicensis 1973 [1929]) for his provision of the ‘Ten Commandments’ that promote a pursuit to science and truth; encourage humane treatment of differing positions on the same issue; recognize a distinction between criticizing form and content, where the former is less important; and eschew false praise. Whether reviewers are always or consistently successful in this pursuit, however, remains outside the scope of the present study.

3. Methodology & Data

The prestige (or lack thereof) associated with the book review is not apparently field-dependent in the same way that certain disciplines currently appear to have a preference for book-length manuscripts (e.g. history and philosophy), for articles published in academic journals (e.g. linguistics), or for research published in conference proceedings (e.g. computer science). For this reason, the present study begins with two assumptions: First, regardless of one’s personal sentiment toward the writing or value of an academic book review, the resulting product provides a source of data that can be fruitfully analyzed. Second, although academic journals do publish book reviews of their own, they are not nearly as accessible and, in many cases, as long-lasting as the repository that is the LL.

With these two assumptions in mind, the present study is informed by bibliometric methodologies that strive to uncover quantitatively important metrics for extant scholarship. In pursuit of this, the following four key research questions were formulated prior to data collection and analysis:

1. How expansive is the ‘landscape’ for book reviews over the last thirty years (1994-2024) in terms of frequency and coverage?
2. Are there any significant differences among reviews according to the temporal distance between the publishing of the book and its review; the gender, country, and title/position of the reviewer; or the initial publisher of the book?
3. Do the keywords associated with a book reflect a greater or lesser diachronic propensity to publish in or about particular subfields of linguistics?
4. What does the inclusion of particular references indicate about citational density and/or the tendency to cite specific works?

Because prior scholarship discusses the academic book review but neglects the ancillary material linked to the review, the reader will notice that the focus of these questions is not on the actual content of the book reviews but, rather, on those additional data points.

The corpus investigated here contains over four-thousand book reviews (N=4,508) obtained in June 2024 from the publicly-accessible mailing list archives of the LL, which is organized by month and year. The criteria for inclusion were straightforward: The review needed to address a book (or, on a few occasions, a piece of linguistics-related software), needed to be accessible on and published by the LL, and needed to be an actual review (i.e. not a set of corrections to a prior published review). A multi-authored review and multiple versions of the same review (in different languages) were treated as singular submissions; however, a multi-book review was excluded entirely unless it was clear which sections corresponded to which book. On the other hand, all the

authors of a multi-authored review were treated as separate individuals for the purposes of discussing reviewer-specific characteristics.

These files were collected with *wget* and preprocessed to remove ancillary commentary and all tags, some of which were abbreviated and/or written inconsistently, for easier parsing. The contemporary, prototypical book review for LL contains four sections, which correspond to the summary, the evaluation, the included references, and the biographical sketch of the reviewer. Some reviews digress from this format by separating individual chapters of the book into different sections of the review or by including footnoted commentary. Additionally, a few reviews were ‘split’ across multiple emails, and a very small number included more than one reviewer; in both instances, these data needed to be treated slightly differently to ensure that books were not incorrectly listed as having been reviewed multiple times, for instance. Over ninety percent (91.98%) contained at least two demarcated sections corresponding to the summary and evaluation, while almost sixty percent (56.08%) also explicitly indicated sections for the references and biographical blurb from the reviewer. Despite the fact that some of the reviewers wrote their biographical statement in the first-person, third-person referents were far more common and, thus, are described here as *biographical* instead of *autobiographical*.

Before any of the data could be meaningfully compared, multiple scripts were written in a combination of *AWK* and *Python*, following the best practices outlined in Dougherty and Robbins (1997) and Goyvaerts and Levithan (2012), to standardize the information retrieved. For instance, the first and fourth sections have been prefaced historically by a variety of different labels with various wording and capitalization conventions. Disregarding differences in case, the first section had been variously entitled *Contents of Volume*, *General Synopsis*, *Brief Description*, *Purpose and Contents*, *Synopsis*, *Overview*, *Description*, *Summary*, and *Purpose of Book and Overview*. The second section had been referred to as *About the Author*, *Reviewer Bio*, *Biography*, *Bio*, *About the Reviewer*, *Biographical Sketch*, and *Biographical Statement*.

Additionally, some of the reviews, particularly in the early years, were distributed over multiple messages on the mailing list; consequently, these had to be conjoined to prevent duplication. Similarly, some of the information reflected meta-commentary from either the reviewer or the editors at LL. One slightly humorous example illustrating the technological limitations of the time is the following: “[Editor's note: The 'o' in Dr. Wadensjo's last name has an umlaut over it. Unfortunately, the Linguist Listserv cannot yet deal with diacritics. Our apologies].” A more serious example justified the reviewer’s delay in submission: “I want to publicly curse the person(s) who removed my laptop from my office without notifying me. Apart from a painful loss, this incident also led to the late appearance of this review.”

Finally, the references cited intertextually often utilized a variable number of hyphens, dashes, or underscores to indicate that the same author had written the subsequent source, so these were rewritten with the full names included; likewise, there was often variation in the citational format selected for external references, such that first names, middle names, states, and publishers were inconsistently spelled out or abbreviated, titles were sometimes enveloped by double or single quotation marks or underscores (to indicate italicized text), and years of publication were written with or without parentheses, as in the examples in (1) and (2) below.

- (1) a. Zubizarreta, Maria L.. 1998. *Prosody, Focus, and Word Order*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
b. Zubizarreta, M.-L. 1998. *Prosody, Focus, and Word Order*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
c. Zubizarreta, Maria L. 1998. *Prosody, Focus, and Word Order*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
d. Zubizarreta, Maria Luisa (1998). *Prosody, Focus, and Word Order*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
e. Zubizarreta, Maria Luisa, 1998. "Prosody, Focus and Word Order." Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- (2) a. Toury, G. (1995) *_Descriptive Translation Studies And Beyond_*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
b. Toury, G. (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: Benjamin.
c. Toury, G. 1995. *Descriptive translation studies - and beyond*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
d. Toury, Gideon (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
e. Toury, Gideon. 1995. *Descriptive Translation Studies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

The format of the book reviews, fortunately, became more consistent around 2004, resulting in greater ease in extracting the relevant information computationally, all of which was verified manually prior to analysis. Next, a database was created with two separate tables. The first table contains only two columns reflecting the filename and the list of sources referenced in the book review. The second table contains fourteen columns corresponding to the following pieces of information: the filename; the day, month, and year of review publication; the issue; the editor-selected keywords associated with the book; the author(s) and/or editor(s) of the book; the title, publisher, and publication date of the book; and the name of and a brief biographical statement from the reviewer. From the biographical statement in particular, it was also possible to extract additional details, such as the current position, country, and gender of the reviewer, the last of which was determined on the basis of self-referential pronominal usage.

Furthermore, in the case of the reviewer's current position, this communicated a story about his or her professional objectives and trajectory. For example, it was possible to witness the advancement of specific reviewers and the collaborative nature of post-secondary institutions, particularly in Europe, where a reviewer could be undertaking a doctoral degree at two different universities. However, there were also a few areas where surface-level incongruities presented difficulty. For instance, the decision was made to code "Lecturer" positions in Europe as "Assistant Professor," which is generally the corresponding position in the USA. Similarly, in instances where the reviewer retired from a faculty position, he or she was listed as "Faculty (Emeritus)," whether *Emeritus/Emerita* status had been formally conferred or not. The same applied to reviewers who self-identified as "Ph.D. Candidate" or "Ph.D. Student." Because it is unclear whether this distinction exists globally, both were considered analytically to belong to a single category ("Ph.D. Student"), which was distinguished from "MA Student" and "Graduate Student (Unspecified)."

In retrieving, extracting, standardizing, and verifying these data, it became possible to apply a bibliometric methodology (see e.g. Diodato and Gellatly 1994, Berger and Baker 2014, Hood and Wilson 2001, and Ball 2018) to understand quantitatively and qualitatively what has been written and cited by whom in which subfields of linguistics within the academic book review genre published over almost thirty years. The bibliometric approach, which supplanted a variety of earlier nomenclature, was defined by Alan Pritchard, a pioneer of the field, as "the application of mathematics and statistical methods to shed light on the processes of written communication and on the nature and course of development of a discipline [...] by means of counting and analyzing the various facets of written communication" (qtd. in Lawani 1981:294). In this manner, any type of text could potentially be used for bibliometric analysis, including citations of published books and articles, inclusion in formal bibliographies, and directories of authors or subscribers.

Nonetheless, as indicated by the name of the field itself, bibliometrics was (and remains) principally concerned with book-length publications; however, increasing emphasis upon citational metrics has resulted, at least in the eyes of some (cf. McBurney and Novak 2002, Weingart 2005, and Hicks et al. 2015), in a perceived distortion of the field's objectives to such an extent that 'fast' science is praised over high-quality research. Such opposition is also found within bibliometrics itself, where Molinié and Bodenhausen (2015) even describe the employment of bibliometrics as "weapons of mass citation." Nevertheless, this perspective is not exclusive to science. Mikics (2013), for instance, analogizes this to a larger societal tendency for speed and convenience over depth and quality with particular reference to the act of reading and commonplace tasks like cooking. Put another way, a number of computational tools (e.g. *BibExcel*, *VOSviewer*, *Bibliometrix*, and *Publish or Perish*) and indices (e.g. the impact factor of journals and the h-index, Erdős number, and *ResearchGate* score of individual authors) have been developed through and against which scholars' research and potential research productivity are measured.

Despite such criticism, the bibliometric approach has demonstrated itself a useful tool in recent years for understanding linguistics as a field of inquiry (e.g. Crosthwaite et al. 2023, Lei and Liu 2019, Arik 2015, Mohsen et al. 2017, Sun et al. 2021, Lin and Lei 2020, and Zhong and Lei 2020) and for investigating the review genre itself (e.g. Li and Liang 2024, Nicolaisen 2002, and Hayashi 2020). As such, the reader should understand that the present study is descriptive and exploratory, *not* explanatory, theoretical, or argumentative, in that it attempts to characterize the diachronic state of the field *through* the reviews and reviewers, never losing sight of the fact that the authors involved are humans, after all.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Surveying the Book Review 'Landscape'

The reviewed books represent eight languages: English (94.90%), French (2.15%), German (1.51%), Spanish (1.24%), Portuguese (0.07%), Italian (0.07%), Swedish (0.04%), and Dutch (0.02%). Although reviews can be provided in the language of the original publication, this was very rarely undertaken, as all but half a dozen were written exclusively in English, with a select few in German and Spanish. This decision was likely influenced both by the language of the original publication and more widespread, international knowledge of English as an academic language, perhaps resulting in easier access for readers. Put another way, the global population of L2 speakers of any of the aforementioned languages is greater for English; thus, a review written in English about a book written in a language other than English renders the book accessible to more readers.

As demonstrated by Figure 1 below, the release of over four-thousand reviews has witnessed punctuated episodes of greater or lesser activity. For instance, the five-year period of lowest productivity was 1995-1999 (121 reviews), certainly due to the fact that the LL had just formally launched; 2000-2004 (1124 reviews) and 2010-2014 (1017), the five-year periods of greatest productivity. The years between and after this point have experienced a decline, though this is likely attributable to publishing trends and not to the field itself. In other words, the likelihood of a book being reviewed on the LL without a publisher partnership is lower than the reverse; as such, if authors are releasing books through other publishers, then their work might be less likely to appear on the LL, an important caveat to consider in the findings hereafter. Likewise, it is entirely possible (and likely!) that scholars have pursued opportunities to publish original research in traditional academic journals with greater frequency due to institutional pressures. Moreover, publishing trends in many fields have resulted in a shift from monographs toward

journal articles and conference proceedings, which generally warrant published responses, not reviews.

On the other hand, it is also simultaneously possible that scholars are growing increasingly weary of engaging in unpaid service at the expense of their research and teaching, which contribute, in many instances, more profoundly toward their advancement opportunities. Similarly, as indicated in Figure 2, the majority of reviews are published, mirroring the typical academic calendar at American colleges and universities, during the winter (December/January) and summer (May-August) intercessions, reflecting decreased on-site responsibilities for many faculty members and, consequently, periods of time where dedication toward research and research-adjacent activities can be undertaken.

Figure 1: *Reviews by Year of Publication*

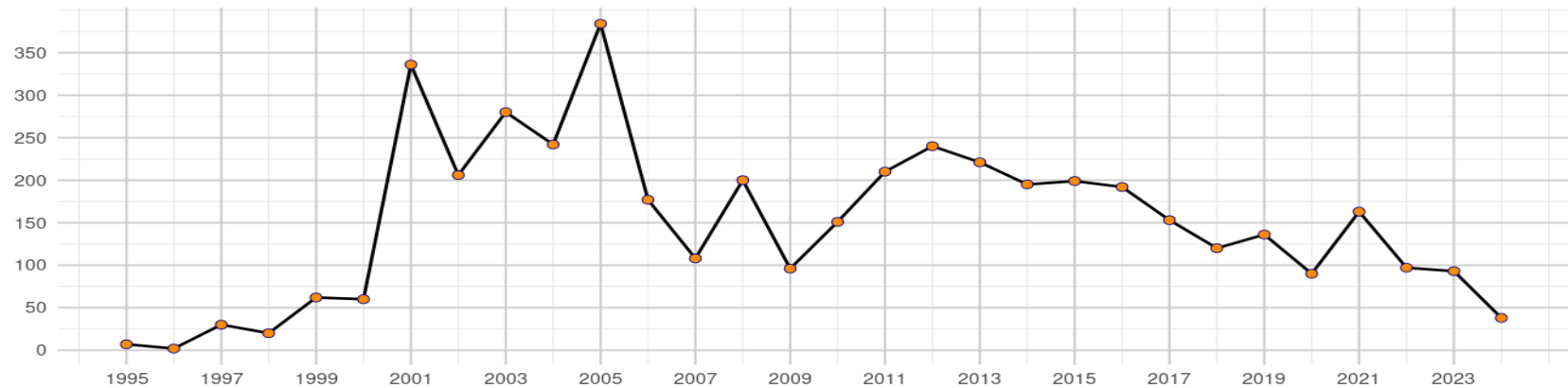
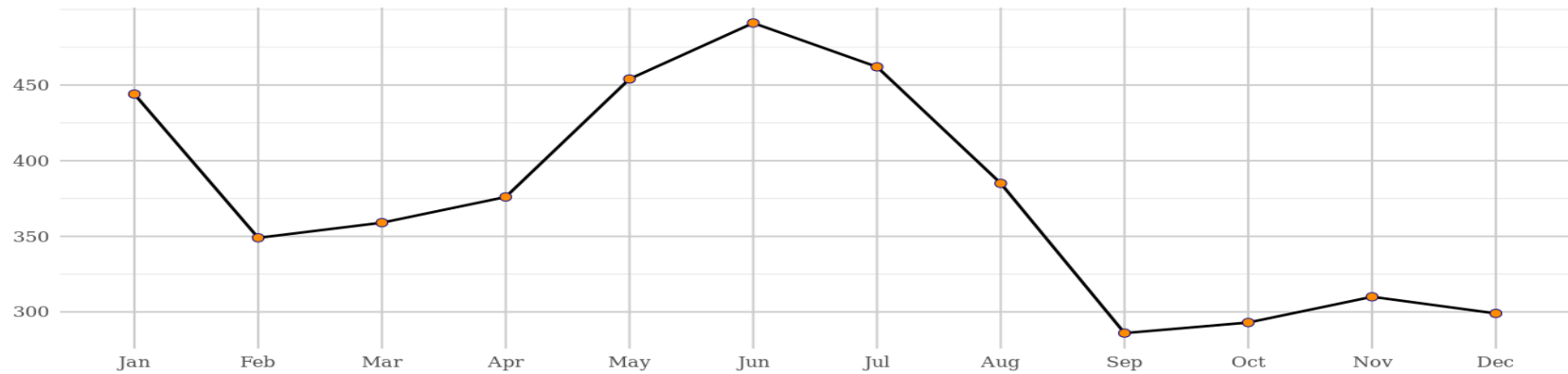


Figure 2: *Reviews by Month of Publication*



Approximately eighty-five percent (85.18%) of the reviews contain some sort of metadata indicating the (sub)fields to which the book belongs. The keywords, where provided, were found in the subject line of the corresponding submission, and a number of steps were taken to ensure consistency and avoid redundancy, resulting in a total of approximately two hundred distinct categories. As a result of this reorganization, some interesting diachronic trends are uncovered that reflect linguists' interest in particular topics of scholarly inquiry. As Table 1 demonstrates, the ten most frequent keywords associated with the books about which the reviews were written demonstrate significant coverage for the five-year intervals represented.

Table 1: Top Keywords by Five-Year Range					
Years	Top Ten Areas by Keyword (N/% of Range)				Coverage
1995-1999	—				
2000-2004	<i>Sociolinguistics</i>	114 (12.85%)	<i>Semantics</i>	48 (5.41%)	553 (62.33%)
	<i>Syntax</i>	89 (10.03%)	<i>Discourse Analysis</i>	46 (5.19%)	
	<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	52 (5.86%)	<i>Linguistic Theory</i>	38 (4.28%)	
	<i>Historical Linguistics</i>	52 (5.86%)	<i>Documentation/Description</i>	35 (3.95%)	
	<i>Pragmatics</i>	48 (5.41%)	<i>Cognitive Science</i>	31 (3.49%)	
2005-2009	<i>Sociolinguistics</i>	165 (11.85%)	<i>Semantics</i>	64 (4.60%)	818 (58.75%)
	<i>Syntax</i>	122 (8.76%)	<i>Pragmatics</i>	63 (4.53%)	
	<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	100 (7.18%)	<i>Morphology</i>	50 (3.59%)	
	<i>Discourse Analysis</i>	94 (6.75%)	<i>Phonology</i>	40 (2.87%)	
	<i>Historical Linguistics</i>	82 (5.89%)	<i>Linguistic Theory</i>	38 (2.73%)	
2010-2014	<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	271 (12.84%)	<i>Historical Linguistics</i>	112 (5.31%)	1,450 (68.70%)
	<i>Sociolinguistics</i>	252 (11.94%)	<i>Semantics</i>	111 (5.26%)	
	<i>Syntax</i>	169 (8.01%)	<i>Pragmatics</i>	105 (4.97%)	
	<i>Discourse Analysis</i>	150 (7.11%)	<i>Linguistic Theory</i>	82 (3.88%)	
	<i>Language Acquisition</i>	128 (6.06%)	<i>General Linguistics</i>	70 (3.32%)	
2015-2019	<i>Sociolinguistics</i>	304 (13.17%)	<i>Pragmatics</i>	112 (4.85%)	1,415 (61.29%)
	<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	217 (9.40%)	<i>General Linguistics</i>	104 (4.50%)	
	<i>Language Acquisition</i>	141 (6.11%)	<i>Syntax</i>	100 (4.33%)	
	<i>Discourse Analysis</i>	135 (5.85%)	<i>Linguistic Theory</i>	96 (4.16%)	
	<i>Historical Linguistics</i>	123 (5.33%)	<i>Cognitive Science</i>	83 (3.59%)	
2020-2024	<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	118 (13.17%)	<i>General Linguistics</i>	43 (4.80%)	544 (60.70%)
	<i>Sociolinguistics</i>	99 (11.05%)	<i>Pragmatics</i>	42 (4.69%)	
	<i>Syntax</i>	50 (5.58%)	<i>Language Acquisition</i>	34 (3.79%)	
	<i>Historical Linguistics</i>	46 (5.13%)	<i>Semantics</i>	34 (3.79%)	
	<i>Discourse Analysis</i>	44 (4.91%)	<i>Cognitive Science</i>	34 (3.79%)	

However, there were a few areas where a noticeable increase or decrease in publication might reflect broader tendencies in the field—or, perhaps in some instances, the availability of funding and publishing opportunities. For instance, while language documentation/description boasts a respectable four percent (3.95%) during 2000-2004, it completely disappears from the top-ten list for the next twenty years. Such a change could be impacted by fewer, more competitive opportunities for funding; by greater opportunities for open-access publishing, which *may* result in fewer post-publication reviews; and by students writing graduate-level theses and dissertations on undocumented languages (i.e. instead of more established scholars publishing books), which might warrant a ‘notice’ on the LL, but not a formal book review. Despite this, there was a noticeable

rebound in recent years. Conversely, there were a few (sub)fields that experienced more extreme periods of increase or decrease, the most salient of which are represented in Table 2 below.

Because the LL is available for the use of and consultation by linguists from any field, though, suggesting on the basis of this table that text/corpus linguistics, translation, and computational linguistics are somehow less ‘important’ now than in the past would be misguided; instead, it is more sensible to recognize that books in these areas are often reviewed in field-specific journals. On the other hand, from the sustained decrease in reviews on books discussing the discipline of linguistics, one might reasonably infer that reflective praxis is lacking in linguistics more broadly

Table 2: Comparative Increases/Decreases by (Sub)fields Diachronically				
	2000-2004 to 2005-2009	2005-2009 to 2010-2014	2010-2014 to 2015-2019	2015-2019 to 2020-2024
<i>Sociolinguistics</i>	-7.77%	+0.71%	+10.29%	-16.08%
<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	+22.54%	+78.70%	-26.79%	+40.13%
<i>Syntax</i>	-12.65%	-8.66%	-45.90%	+28.85%
<i>Historical Linguistics</i>	+0.48%	-9.94%	+0.40%	-3.62%
<i>Discourse Analysis</i>	+30.21%	+5.22%	-17.72%	-16.01%
<i>Pragmatics</i>	-16.37%	+9.90%	-2.48%	-3.36%
<i>Language Acquisition</i>	-22.12%	+155.77%	+0.71%	-37.86%
<i>Semantics</i>	-15.04%	+14.37%	-39.87%	+20.03%
<i>Linguistic Theory</i>	-36.28%	+42.29%	+7.03%	-14.10%
<i>General Linguistics</i>	+0.61%	+53.86	+35.83%	+6.55%
<i>Cognitive Science</i>	-58.89%	+120.90%	+13.26%	+5.56%
<i>Morphology</i>	+32.75%	-26.15%	+4.49%	-23.50%
<i>Psycholinguistics</i>	-34.08%	-5.49%	-4.32%	+54.62%
<i>Text/Corpus Linguistics</i>	-21.80%	+12.34%	+60.99%	-39.55%
<i>Documentation/Description</i>	-30.82%	-35.79%	-15.99%	+21.27%
<i>Translation</i>	-20.35%	+2.87%	-22.64%	-29.72%
<i>Anthropological Linguistics</i>	-42.07%	+51.66%	+82.85%	+73.67%
<i>Phonetics</i>	-22.62%	+43.52%	-35.76%	+78.41%
<i>Computational Linguistics</i>	-61.77%	-1.09%	+47.30%	-2.25%
<i>Lexicography</i>	-53.05%	-29.35%	+15.80%	-59.31%
<i>Linguistics & Literature</i>	-4.42%	+361.58%	+17.55%	-33.19%
<i>History of Linguistics</i>	-36.28%	+130.79%	-25.99%	-54.52%
<i>Neurolinguistics</i>	-36.28%	+31.88%	-8.58%	+93.28%
<i>Discipline of Linguistics</i>	—	+394.55%	-39.05%	-100%

(cf. Spier 2024).

4.2. Reviewer-Specific Characteristics

Almost all reviews (99.18%) were accompanied by a biographical statement. There seems to be a predilection, at least in the first and second years, simply to provide one’s name, institution, and contact information, likely a consequence of initial submission through email. Biographical statements after this point, however, are more prosaic in nature and provide greater insight into the qualifications, accomplishments, affiliation(s), and/or prior publications of the reviewers. Over two-thousand unique individuals (N=2,172) were responsible for writing book reviews during the almost thirty-year period covered here, and eighty-three nations are represented, those of which

occupy the top-fifteen positions are reproduced in Table 3. Thirty-two reviews were co- or multi-authored (0.71%), and all others were written by single authors (99.29%). Unlike academic articles, book reviews are generally not a collaborative task; consequently, this finding is not especially unexpected.

Table 3: Top Fifteen Nations by Total Reviews and Unique Reviewers				
Position	Country	Reviews	Reviewers' Gender	
			Male	Female
1	USA	1371	48.29%	51.71%
2	UK	307	39.41%	60.59%
3	Germany	306	45.43%	54.58%
4	Canada	219	53.88%	46.12%
5	Italy	155	32.90%	67.10%
6	France	138	55.07%	44.93%
7	China	116	61.74%	38.26%
8	Australia	87	43.68%	56.32%
9	Spain	86	41.86%	58.14%
10	Japan	83	80.72%	19.28%
11	Russia	71	57.75%	42.25%
12	India	64	70.31%	29.69%
13	The Netherlands	58	46.55%	53.45%
14	Finland	48	33.33%	66.67%
	Turkey	48	39.58%	60.42%
15	Romania	46	32.61%	67.39%
	Poland	46	67.39%	32.61%

Male and female reviewers are almost equally represented at 49.47% and 50.44%, respectively. Based on the biographical statements offered, the gender of only four reviewers could not be reliably identified. Nevertheless, reviewers from China, Japan, India, and Poland skewed male, while reviewers from the UK, Italy, Spain, Finland, Turkey, and Romania skewed female. Relative gender parity was attested in the other nations at the 'top' of the list. Although this was not the case for all nations indicated in reviewers' affiliations, complete dominance by male reviewers (e.g. in Iceland, Jordan, and Tunisia) or by female reviewers (e.g. in Croatia, Oman, and Moldova) was impacted by a comparatively smaller set of unique reviewers and, in some instances (e.g. in Jordan and Oman), by a single individual.

Despite the early dominance of male reviewers, female reviewers have fulfilled this valuable service to a (slightly) greater degree than men since 2011 on the LL, likely attributable both to the unpaid nature of the work and by shifting dynamics within linguistics as an interdisciplinary field. Put more concretely, because research in linguistics increasingly straddles the humanities and social sciences, more potential reviewers are available; furthermore, women often undertake unpaid service obligations at a much higher rate than men (cf. Guarino & Borden 2017). Furthermore, as Dickerson, Durvasula, and Liter (2019) note, "[W]hile more than 50% of graduate students in linguistics are women, only about 35% of assistant professors are women. Of academics who have received tenure, about 55% of associate professors are women but only 35%

of full professors are women.” For this reason, there are presumably fewer women employed in linguistics at academic institutions, which makes their contribution all the more noticeable.

The resulting corpus of reviewers’ biographical blurbs comprises approximately one-quarter million words (N=255,195). On average, female reviewers wrote slightly longer biographical statements (60.01 words vs. 57.71 words), but those written by male reviewers had a higher range (220 vs. 244). Nonetheless, the median and IQR both were almost identical. Similarly, solo-authored biographical statements were generally longer than their co- or multi-authored counterparts.

Reviewers’ are employed primarily within education, as over seventy percent are either educators (45.64%) or students (27.61%). The other four categories include researchers (10.70%), unspecified (8.22%), independent or non-academically affiliated scholars (6.15%), and administrators (1.69%). These numbers have remained stable over the years, though punctuated increases in independent scholars are attested in 2001-2002, 2009-2010, 2018-2019, and from 2022-2024, for which one might reasonably speculate that economic instability, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and increased disappointment in employment prospects in academia are likely responsible. On the other hand, student participation almost tripled by the start of the 2000-2004 period and continued to rise before reaching a plateau. When it finally started to decline, it appears that much of the remaining work was assumed by faculty members. Consequently, it is clear that the total number and frequency of reviews published on the LL are most directly impacted by the level of involvement of educators and students, as those in other professional roles serve in a supportive capacity. Unsurprisingly, almost all student reviewers were in graduate school, most of whom were pursuing a doctoral degree (90.21% Ph.D. programs, 3.37% MA programs, and 6.01% unspecified but at the graduate level).

On the other hand, it was surprising to discover four reviews written by undergraduate students and one written by a high school student. Three of the five were released in early years (2000-2002), though two were published more recently (in 2016 and 2022). Such a limited number of contributions may indicate a lack of interest at the pre-graduate level, as the LL does not formally specify degree requirement for participation; on the other hand, the electronic form to request a book to review does ask one to supply a list of publications, degrees obtained, and areas of specialty, suggesting tacitly that secondary and undergraduate students are unlikely or less likely to be able to complete the task effectively.

Although over half the reviewers did not submit any additional reviews, there were some common threads concerning the professional trajectory of the reviewers. The two most common stages of entry and exit corresponded to enrollment in graduate school (34.9%/20.97%) or while starting a tenure-track position (15.39%/17.49%). In other words, while anyone is eligible to write a review for the LL, reviewer participation does not appear to be a long-term commitment but, instead, one that enables a straightforward entrance into academic writing at a time when one is still relatively new to the conventions of the genre and/or before one has fully acclimated to the research requirements for tenure and promotion. Those at the rank of “(Full) Professor” and “Professor (Emeritus)” *do* undertake review writing, but they are frequently overshadowed by independent scholars, post-doctoral research fellows, and contingent faculty members.

Figure 3: Reviewers by Position Type

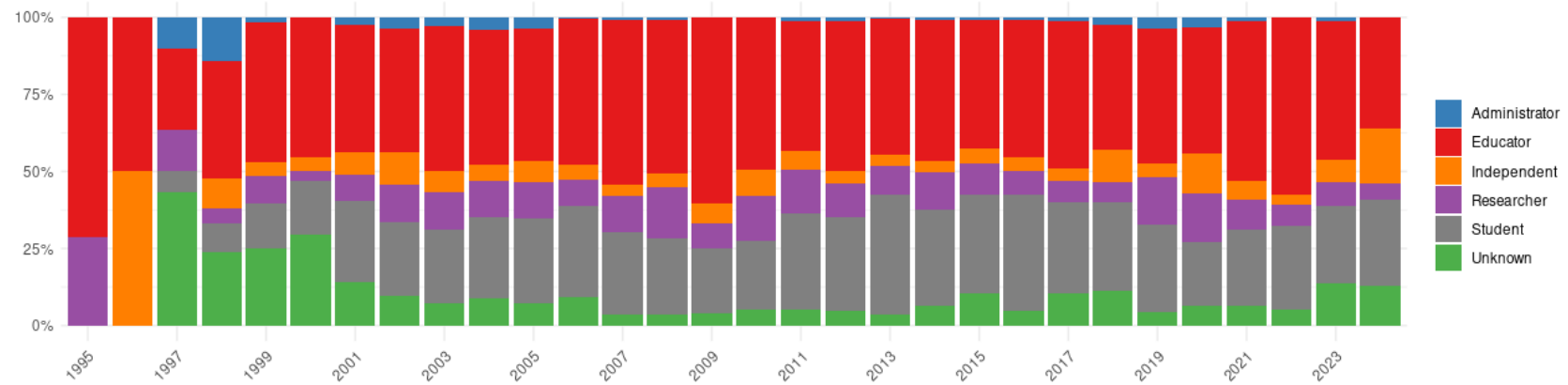
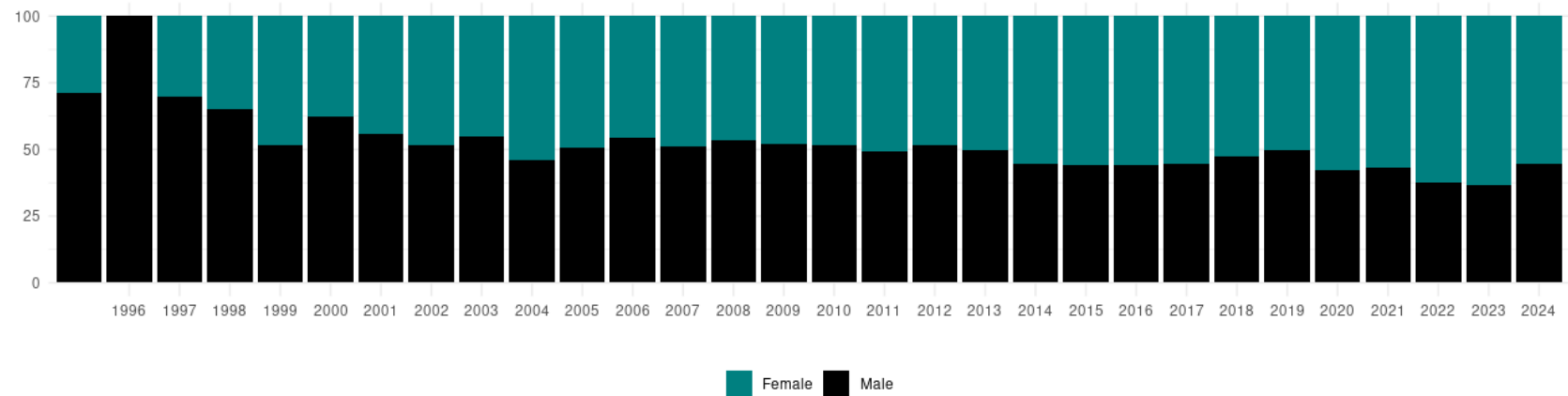


Figure 4: Reviewers by Gender



A few important qualifiers must be made here concerning the coding of the data. First, dual appointments and dual national affiliations were each assigned a value of 0.5 as not to skew the results, particularly given, for instance, the impossibility of actually residing in two countries simultaneously and the unlikelihood that an individual was working full-time both as an independent translator and as a university professor. Second, in instances where someone in the USA listed both educational responsibilities (e.g. 'Ph.D. Student') and pedagogical obligations (e.g. 'Instructor'), these were treated as equally valid and separate from one another only if different institutions were assigned to each, as teaching duties are frequently a requirement for institutional funding in pursuit of a doctoral degree; as such, the former was treated as primary, as the latter would not have been possible with the status as student. Third, all individuals listed in conjunction with co- or multi-authored reviews were treated as if their reviews were submitted separately. Fourth, an attempt was made to 'translate' international titles for institutional positions, as a 'Senior Lecturer' in the UK and a 'Maître de Conférences' in France (among other countries) are roughly comparable to 'Assistant Professor' in the USA. Fifth, biographical statements that indicated teaching responsibilities at a college or university without using a formal title (e.g. 'Teacher-Trainer' and 'Teacher Educator') were simply treated as 'Faculty (Unspecified).' Finally, any position that primarily requires administrative responsibilities was coded as 'Administrative,' and any non-teaching, non-administrative, and non-student position was listed as 'Independent Scholar.'

4.3. Diachronic Distance between Publication and Review

One of the many objectives of a book review is, of course, to inform potential readers about the merits and shortcomings of published scholarship in a timely manner. To delay the time between the publication of the book and the review, however, results in a commentary that is, at best, potentially unhelpful to readers; at worst, no longer relevant. Fortunately, those included on the LL demonstrate that the field and its reviewers are committed to the task, as over eighty percent (84.42%) are released, on average, within one year of publication, and over ninety percent are released within two (95.41%) or three years (97.35%). In fact, for the entire period examined here, the majority in any given year were released no later than one year after the initial publication of the book, where the lowest years were 1995 (71.43%) and 2019 (75.74%). Such consistency likely reflects not only the many partnerships that the LL has with over a dozen academic publishers that supply copies to reviewers, but also the growing interest in, support of, and dedication to the success of the LL over the years by editors and scholars alike. For this reason, while many academic journals do solicit, accept, and publish reviews of novel scholarship, the LL certainly remains a potential point of first contact due to its accessibility without requiring a personal subscription or institutional access.

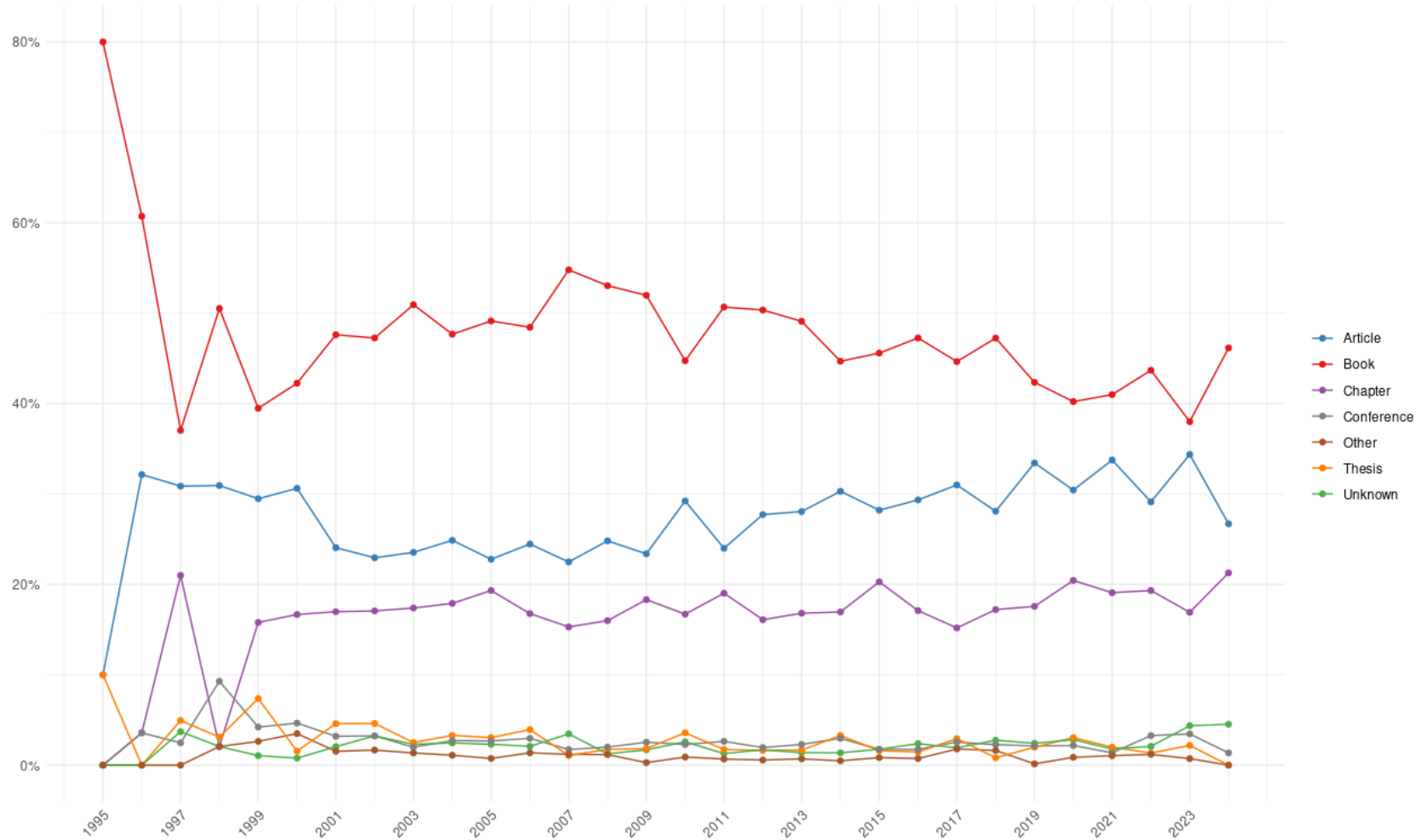
4.4. Citational Density and Tendencies

Across all the book reviews published on the LL, some citational patterns begin to emerge. Almost seventy percent (65.07%) contain references to external sources, and a total of over twenty-thousand (N=26,685) references are provided, ranging from zero to over one hundred (0-133) per review, averaging 7.49 sources per review. Educators include 475% more references on average than their student counterparts (i.e. twenty-three vs. four references), suggesting greater familiarity or facility with extant scholarship and, as demonstrated in Figure 4 below, specifically with book-length treatments. The most extreme of these, however, is clearly an outlier, though a justifiable one, in that it provides an overview and evaluation of the fifteenth edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, a text containing over one thousand pages. Nonetheless, the majority

(62.03%) include between one and ten sources. Given that the book review is a fundamentally different genre than a literature review, one would not expect, then, to find unnecessarily extensive bibliographies. Consequently, it cannot be stated *a priori* that a review containing more references is necessarily a 'better' one.

In employing *AnyStyle.io*, a bibliographic parser written in Ruby, the references were assigned through trained pattern-matching to the most likely type of source. Although the formatting of references was inconsistent, approximately ninety-eight percent (97.88%) were reliably assigned a label, including journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers or proceedings, theses/dissertations, and other (manuscripts, websites, reports, interviews, software, and book reviews). As Figure 4 also indicates below, books, journal articles, and book chapters (in descending order) dominate the references included, regardless of the year being considered, and both journal articles and book chapters are cited at comparable rates on average.

Figure 4: *References by Source Type*



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Table 4: Top Cited Sources and Authors

	By Sources	N		By Authors	N
1	Chomsky, Noam. 1995. <i>The Minimalist Program</i> . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.	108		Noam Chomsky	639
2	Kayne, Richard. 1994. <i>The Antisymmetry of Syntax</i> . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.	63		William Labov	178
3	Cerquiglini, Bernard et al. 2000. <i>Tu Parles !? : Le Français dans tous ses états</i> . Paris, France: Flammarion.	58		George Lakoff	174
4	Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. 1981. <i>Metaphors We Live By</i> . Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.	54		M.A.K. Halliday	144
5	Halliday, M.A.K. 1985. <i>An Introduction to Functional Grammar</i> . London, UK: Hodder Arnold.	52		Ray Jackendoff	104
6	Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson. 1986. <i>Relevance: Communication and Cognition</i> . Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.	46		Deirdre Wilson	94
7	Langacker, Ronald W. <i>Foundations of Cognitive Grammar: Theoretical Prerequisites</i> . Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.	37		Luigi Rizzi	92
8	Austin, John Langshaw. 1962. <i>How to Do Things with Words</i> . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.	35		Mark Johnson	91
9	Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. 1978. <i>Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage</i> . New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.	34		Dan Sperber	87
10	Chomsky, Noam. 1965. <i>Aspects of the Theory of Syntax</i> . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.	34		Richard Kayne	82
11	Chomsky, Noam. 1981. <i>Lectures on Government and Binding</i> . Dordrecht, NL: Foris.	34		Penelope Brown	81
12	Rizzi, Luigi. 1997. <i>The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery</i> . Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer.	33		Norman Fairclough	77
13	Grice, Herbert Paul. 1975. <i>Logic and Conversation</i> . New York, NY: Academic Press.	32		Morris Halle	77
14	Chomsky, Noam. 2000. <i>Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework</i> . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.	31		William Croft	76
15	Chomsky, Noam. 1999. <i>Derivation by Phase</i> . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.	26		Herbert Paul Grice	76
	Prince, Alan and Paul Smolensky. 1993. <i>Optimality Theory: Constraint Interaction in Generative Grammar</i> . New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University.	26		Stephen Levinson	76

5. Conclusions

Although academic book reviews provide a valuable service to the field, this is not a service that is always viewed as comparable to other types of academic publications. For this reason, they rarely fulfill the research requirements associated with tenure and promotion and, consequently, often serve as a task that scholars and many graduate students are discouraged from undertaking. Moreover, while many institutional materials often serve as a source of data in published research, the academic book review is less commonly considered—perhaps partially because of the perception of them, perhaps partially because of their typical length, and perhaps partially because of the content one expects to find in them. In instances where book reviews are investigated, though, the primary focus tends to be on adherence to the conventions of the genre and in offering a pragmatically-informed analysis of the exchange of ideas, evaluative or otherwise.

Nonetheless, the present study has illustrated how academic book reviews, when viewed in conjunction with one another across a larger period of time, can provide useful insight into the trends and practices within linguistics. Because it specifically relies upon reviews published on the LL, arguably the most important electronic repository for the field, this study also describes the individuals who voluntarily undertake such a devalued responsibility. In doing so, over four thousand reviews and over twenty thousand references are examined in a descriptive, exploratory manner. It must, of course, be understood that the qualifications of the reviewer are not an indication of the quality of the review; similarly, the citational density found within the reviews should not serve as a testament to the importance of the works cited. Instead, both should be understood as litmus tests for the field: The most prolific reviewers provide stability, but all reviewers provide a valuable service to the profession. Likewise, as articulated in Andrés (2009), an inverse relationship also exists between the typical number of citations of a particular piece of scholarship and the amount of time that has elapsed *unless* the work has been recognized as canonical.

Further research into this area might clarify the situation even more forcefully. For instance, it might be possible that formal academic journals reflect a different state of affairs than those presented here. In a similar vein, while certain (sub)fields are not widely, consistently represented through the reviews in this corpus, these might be covered in greater depth in field-specific journals and/or compiled bibliographies. For this reason, it may well be the case that potential readers are pursuing alternative venues to examine books prior to purchase (e.g. in electronic marketplaces or through ‘book blurbs’ printed on covers), thus limiting the immediate usefulness of the reviews on the LL, something that the author has taken for granted. Finally, an in-depth treatment of the sociological dimension (i.e. by gender, nation of origin, etc.) might provide additional insight into the nature of unpaid work in academia. Such findings can enable a transparent conversation about research and service obligations or career advancement. With increasing emphasis upon the potential for quantitative metrics to clarify otherwise qualitative, evaluative materials, these are just a few of the ways in which research into this area could be extended.

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Other Declarations

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