

Book Reviews in CAE Exams Papers: A Tool for Developing Vocabulary

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Abstract

Cambridge Assessment, generally known under the name Cambridge University Press & Assessment, is a part of the University of Cambridge plays a major role in educational assessment and qualifications worldwide. Its main roles include providing internationally recognised exams and results, organising and marking exams in order to be obtained different certificates, supporting institutions, candidates and teachers, as well as ensuring reliability and fairness in global education standards.

In conducting our study on the role of book reviews in CAE examinations and English language learning, we focused on identifying the use of both the descriptive and evaluative discourse of literary critics, used with the main purpose of persuading the audience, as well as on assessing its educational and instructional qualities, concerning Cambridge English exam candidates.

Keywords: book reviews, literary critique, Cambridge qualifications, vocabulary development.

1. Introduction

In the Cambridge C1 Advanced exam, a few parts include pieces of specialised language. More



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specifically, Parts 5 and 6 of the Reading and Use of English paper often include longer, more



detailed texts that require close reading, deep understanding and a skillful mastering of critical thinking. In this respect, one of the most common types of text occurring in these parts is under the form of book reviews. These pieces of text are particularly useful in this situation due to their capacity of combining informative content with personal opinion, their role including a wide range of functions, such as offering rich language, highlighting a varied tone and creating structured arguments. All these factors act as elements having the ability to test a candidate's reading skills, at an advanced level.

In Part 5 for instance, candidates typically have to read an entire text, usually of long lengths, often embodying a book review, followed by multiple-choice questions. These questions are designed to check the level and the skill of understanding different points of interest and topics within book reviews, including the writer's ideas concerning reality and fiction, the attitude towards the work itself, together with the implied meaning of different structures.

Consequently, in the following part (Part 6), each candidate is asked to match missing paragraphs to the correct gaps into a text, this task being considered the most difficult one in the entire exam, due to the complexity of the task and the wide knowledge a candidate has to master. Therefore, book reviews are highly suitable in this stage of the exam, as they often follow a logical, yet flexible structure, pushing the student to identify how each paragraph develops the topic, while using linking devices in order to solve the task and maintaining coherence, as well as meaning at a larger scale.

Among the reasons offered by candidates concerning the difficulty of the tasks involving their comprehension of book reviews, they mention the following: (1) the complex vocabulary, containing a large list of terms, idioms and phrases, often being characterised by a wide variety of specialised terms; (2) the extensive range of texts, especially the ones extracted from academic sources; (3) the difficult multiple-choice questions, formulated in order to trick the reader's eye; (4) challenges with respect to the understanding meaning and correctly selecting the key-words.

Concerning the first hurdle, the complex vocabulary used in the construction of the texts to read are usually reviews of different sorts, including literary critique, plastic art reviews and even culinary reviews. In the CAE Advanced examination, part 5 consists of one long text, usually about 700-750 words, extracted from a reliable source, the most common choices including a newspaper, magazine, novel etc. There are numerous situations in which the text consists of a book review. The task comprises 6 multiple-choice questions with four answer options (A, B, C, D), all meant to trick the eye of even the more experimented readers. In this respect, multiple challenges may arise, as the answers are not directly stated, but rather need to be identified within the text, along with the main idea of the paragraph and of the entire text. Therefore, the meaning needs to be inferred, a process only available for the ones having a large knowledge of English in specialised terminology and grammatical patterns exploited in different categories of texts. In addition, the options often seem very similar, but only one is fully correct. Therefore, this part tests the candidates' understanding of tone, opinion, argument development and the general understanding and attention paid to details.

As in other challenges, the methodology offered by the Cambridge University provides tips in order to facilitate the understanding of such texts. The first step involves reading the text quickly to identify the general idea, sometimes even twice, so that the questions are easier to approach. Secondly, an inexperienced candidate may read only a few of the variants, which is not advised by the specialists. As an example, they may read until the second option, B, and they stop there, not checking the following two. Even though, in their eyes B must be the correct answer, there is also a possibility for C and D to contain a more complete and suitable answer for the question, in comparison to their first choice. Thus, they need to read the question before the options in order to predict the answer. They have to do this and only after, to use process of elimination, that is to cross out obviously - or not so obvious - unsuitable answers. Last step is to look for synonyms or maybe elements in the text, which may enforce their perception of the right answer, or some which may equally contradict their chosen option. It is worth mentioning that the correct answer

is often phrased differently from the given text.

In this part, the identified challenges were the need for a clear, swift reading of the text. This step may seem ordinary and very obvious, however, there are numerous cases in which candidates do not have the necessary patience to take their time when assessing the text, paired with their inability of recognising terms and patterns of literary critique.

Part 6 is more complicated, as it introduces multiple points of view. The candidates get four short texts, excerpted from different sources, usually books reviews on the same topic or constructed around the same theme. The task comprises four questions, each requiring the student to connect the sentences with one of the texts.

Handling this task requires a wide knowledge concerning the comparison between texts, with the aim of identifying differences and similarities. Moreover, some of the given texts may seem to contradict each other, therefore, candidates are faced with a situation which calls for the critical thinking much discussed in the beginning of this paper. This is achieved by studying the language of literary critique, in order to adapt to the ever-changing shift in style, pattern and choice of terms. Finally, the answers are based on implicit rather than explicit statements; thus, a good understanding of critical terms is vital for succeeding in this part. The advice offered by examiners includes reading the introduction first, as this important part provides the general framework in which students may dwell and perform their analyses, as well as having the necessary patience for assessing the role of each text to identify the main idea before answering questions. Candidates are advised to underline or highlight keywords in the questions and look for similar ideas across the texts and finally, to select the best option.

2. Research Methodology

We have focused upon the category of book reviews, including vocabulary research and identifying patterns. Analysing register involves the stage of examining how language is used in different contexts to convey specific meanings and achieve particular effects. Register analysis is

crucial in understanding how variations in language style, tone and formality affect communication and thus, the process of creating book reviews. It involves a systematic process to ensure that the review is insightful, balanced and engaging.

This research focused on identifying the use of both descriptive and evaluative discourse of literary critics, to the purpose of persuading the audience, as well as of assessing its educational and instructional qualities, concerning Cambridge English exam candidates. Hence, we could observe that critics have a particular manner of engaging in the construction, negotiation and dissemination of meanings constructed in books. Additionally, they gain distinct meanings and functions as they operate at different levels, mainly at the intersection of literary judgment, educational and instructional purposes, being an inclusive part in the process of critical thinking. The analyses performed upon the manner in which students assess the language of reviews have shown the existence of a strong connection between language (its function and its manner of engaging students into developing skills concerning vocabulary assessment) and the formation of appropriate abilities in recognising and understanding meanings within the specialised register of literary critique. Therefore, from a purely communicative point of view, the goal is to understand the extent to which the study of literary critique aids exam candidates perform better when faced with book reviews in the reading parts of CAE examination. We started from the assumption that these reviews have, though not directly, the effect of creating a safe space for the students to understand and analyse, as well as to understand the message, while enhancing their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

2.1. Research objectives

This section has the main purpose of studying the language of literary critics, based on a corpus of current contemporary texts and materials extracted from the samples offered by the Cambridge University for CAE exam preparation. This research analyses and equally highlights the linguistic techniques used by critics, specialised in the domain of literature.

The specific objectives are listed below:

O1: To identify specific terms of the register of literary critique, as well as their role in the process of persuasion.

O2: To underline the morphological, syntactic and pragmatic boundaries of the register used by art critics, used to create an impact upon targeted groups.

O3: To study, analyse and assess the role of literary critique in the process of enriching pupils' vocabulary during their preparation for C1 exam.

O4: To identify a specific pattern of action in similar cases to the one of Cambridge English candidate, as applicable in other domains or for other purposes.

2.2. Research questions

The process of analysing registers and various choices of personalised vocabulary patterns acts as a key operator in assessing the role and influence of literary critique in general, especially within the field of book reviews involved in language assessment. In this respect, this research focused upon understanding the sociological and psychological functions of specialised languages in different contexts, the main goal being the assessment of meaning in language acquisition and vocabulary development. To this purpose, we have established the following research questions:

Q1: What are the linguistic manifestations, roles and functions of literary critique and what impact do they hold upon general understanding of book reviews as a specialised register?

Q2: What is the connection between language, emotion and sociological development within the process of conveying opinions while describing the quality of books?

Q3: Are there any other practical functions and roles influencing targeted groups, in this case, the young generation?

Q4: Does the language of art critique have any pedagogical, instructional and associative implicature, with respect to literary critique?

Q5: Does the language of book reviews have a significant impact upon the process of language acquisition for the candidates preparing for the CAE Advanced English Exam?

2.3. Hypothesis

The language of literary critique encountered in the book reviews included in the fifth and sixth parts of the Reading and Use of English sections of the CAE Advanced English exam has a direct impact upon the students' ability of enriching their vocabulary.

2.4. Methodological Framework

2.4.1. Research methods

At its initial stage, this research involved the process of preplanning and drafting a mind map, aiming to guide our activity, in order to maintain the direction of our study and work. We have begun this journey from the enlarged and highly accessed domain of literary critique in which we needed to consider three essential variables: *who* (literary critics and the targeted group), *where* (the context in which we needed to place the two actors) and *how* (the proper exploration of these dynamics). This process developed to reach the so much desired *why* (the result of this research itself). We have selected the necessary tools for approaching the topic and identified the two layers of data which should be rigorously studied to reach the deeper layers of meaning within enclosed social and cultural spaces. We determined that literary critique offers the untrained eye an exterior layer, available to ordinary readers, as well as a kernel which needs to be reached through the dense body of information, by means of specific methods and techniques. The exterior layer may be brushed and inspected with the aid of quantitative research, in order to gather samples (corpus of texts and different sorts of materials, in this case being the samples of book reviews used as means of assessing reading skills of C1 candidates). These are elements which have the necessary power and finesse to create the opening within the mass of data, in order to collect and to analyse the necessary pieces of information. These are the tools which are considered a vital step when preparing the application of different methodological models upon the cases presented in this research.

We opted for a mixed approach, one which would integrate both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. This perspective enables us to employ different, mixed techniques to

address the research objectives comprehensively and in a balanced manner, as well as the documented responses for the proposed research questions. This methodological synthesis will enable a multifaceted exploration of the subject matter, ensuring both empirical robustness and contextual depth in the study's findings.

The present study revolves around the domain of literary critique, which may be defined as the scholarly examination, evaluation and interpretation of literary texts, involving a critical analysis of literary works. This inquiry was created with the goal of uncovering the deeper meanings within the language of book reviews, while assessing their artistic and functional values to be contextualised within the given historical and societal framework.

However, to achieve the underlying objective of this paper, concentrated in the need for examining the extent to which literary critique, specifically in the form of book reviews, influences vocabulary acquisition among learners preparing for the CAE (C1) language examination, both quantitative and qualitative methods of research proved useful. They involved conducting a targeted study on a group of students enrolled at a Cambridge educational centre. The research specifically followed how exposure to the linguistically rich discourse of book reviews enhances students' lexical development, particularly in relation to parts 5 and 6 of the Reading and Use of English section of the CAE examination.

For the qualitative component, the study used observational techniques at large, followed by discussion, evaluation and focus groups. This particular stage comprised structured discussions with a selected group of C1 students, which we moderated for 3 and 4 months. This method acted as a particularly valuable tool, fostering interactive dialogue that allowed participants to share insights regarding their weekly engagement with book review samples. The goal of these discussions was for students to reflect upon how their exposure to literary critique has expanded their vocabulary, prompting them to investigate unfamiliar terms and discern contextual meanings. The progressive nature of this linguistic development was systematically documented through evaluation charts, facilitating a structured analysis of participants' lexical enhancement

over time.

Additionally, our interest was placed upon the observational research, serving as a complementary qualitative method to corroborate the findings of the focus group. This approach offered details upon the systematic recording of students' behaviours, choices, interactions, preferences and engagement patterns in a very natural, unbiased educational setting. The study incorporated different means, the focus shifting from the mere observation of the participants (in which we have actively engaged with the group) and the *in-absentia* observation (a process in which we assumed a more passive role). This dual observational framework complemented a large and efficiently established framework, offering valuable insights into students' engagement with literary critique and their evolving linguistic competencies.

On the other hand, speaking from the quantitative perspective, the research made use of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, the former being heavily used when summarizing and elucidating important milestones in understanding trends within the collected sets of data. Therefore, the goal was to gain insights into the frequency and distribution of specific linguistic improvements, whilst inferential statistical methods had the chance to be applied upon the collection of data, with the aim of creating strong, well-founded conclusions, capable of making predictions concerning the broader language acquisition patterns.

These statistical tools ensured that the data collected had been neatly organised and appropriately interpreted, allowing for a rigorous examination of the impact of literary critique on vocabulary enrichment.

By synthesizing qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this research provided a comprehensive and empirically substantiated understanding of how literary critique, in the form of book reviews, contributes to lexical expansion and cognitive engagement among advanced English learners.

Furthermore, we will present the components of the research, as mentioned in the beginning of this section.

2.4.2. Participants to the research

We have conducted this study on a number of two groups of C1 candidates enrolled from two different cities of Romania, Bacau and Focsani. The group from Bacau consists of 7 students, while the group from Focsani consists of 9 students, all aged between 14 and 18.

2.4.3. The timeframe of the research

This research was conducted between October 2024 and February 2025, and it included a number of 4, respectively 3 sessions, for the two groups. One session comprised five weeks of preparation, divided into two groups, the first four weeks being for theory, teaching and continuous assessment, whereas the last week involved a mock test, a simulation in which students needed to perform as they would during the real exam.

2.4.4. Research stages

In proceeding to the general monitoring of evolution, being concerned with the final progress per session, we have conceived tests inspired from the samples discussed during the breakdown of the mock tests and from the additional professional reviews used as a complementary task for students struggling in getting acquainted with the intricate language patterns of critique. Each test was handed at the end of each week. The usage of the focus group created even more space for discussion, as students were able to discuss the most difficult tasks and terms between themselves, allowing us to design new challenges and tasks in order to expand their area of study. These tasks included a wide variety of exercises, ranging from mere translation and equivalation of meanings, to more complex ones, such as the reformulation of sentences or certain paragraphs in their own words or using the words discussed as anchor to uphold their focus, as to guide them on this path.

Along this research, even from the first session, we had in view the following aspects: (1) understanding specialised terms and if the meaning was unknown, tracing their connection to other terms or to a certain context of discussion; (2) understanding connective words and their usage, extending their range of employment; (3) identifying typical patterns and intentions of

different sentences; (4) recognising these patterns and using them to the advantage of the students; (5) correctly assessing the messages within the text based on the already acquired knowledge. To this purpose, we planned the focus group meetings as two per session, that are two per a period of five weeks, placed within the first and the fourth week, in order to comprise the theoretical part of the session and not to interfere with the mock test. In this respect, we have planned the following structure for the focus group meetings, as we may observe from the following two tables.

Focus group	Date	Main topic and issues
1.	October 3 rd , 2024	Discussing terms: the level of nouns and adjectives.
2.	October 24 th , 2024	Discussing terms: the level of nouns and adverbs.
3.	November 7 th , 2024	Discussing terms: the level of connective words and other particles.
4.	November 28 th , 2024	Applying the acquired knowledge into a new text- assessing functions.
5.	December 5 th , 2024	Identifying typical patterns in literary critique (1).
6.	January 9 th , 2024	Identifying typical patterns in literary critique (2).
7.	February 6 th , 2024	Paraphrasing, interpreting and rephrasing texts.
8.	February 27 th , 2024	Discussing meanings and correctly assessing messages.

Table 1. The planification of focus group session, with their respective themes and issues of interest, 8 in total for the group of students from Bacau.

Focus group	Date	Main topic and issues
1.	October 3 rd , 2024	Discussing terms: the level of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs.
2.	October 24 th , 2024	Discussing terms: the level of connective words and other particles.
3.	November 7 th , 2024	Identifying typical patterns in literary critique (1).
4.	November 28 th , 2024	Applying the acquired knowledge into a new text- assessing functions.
5.	December 5 th , 2024	Paraphrasing, interpreting and rephrasing texts.
6.	January 9 th , 2024	Discussing meanings and correctly assessing messages.

Table 2. The planification of focus group session, with their respective themes and issues of interest, 6 in total for the group of students from Focsani

During the first focus group meetings, we have assessed the level of terms, as individual units of meaning, as well as collective pieces from a bigger picture. We have discussed the manner in which the review from part 5 employs a mix of formal, semi-formal and conversational language, in order to create a familiar setting for the students to feel acquainted and comfortable when assessing the unknown terms and phrase. By processing as such, we have established the boundaries of common ground, avoiding a forceful approach, one which may take students by surprise and would have the opposite effect. The main goal was to make this stage accessible to a broad readership while maintaining intellectual depth. The terms identified in both groups are listed as follows: formal terms *transition, ubiquitous, decentralisation, advent, irrevocably, entrenched, superiority, foibles, sociological insights*; semi-formal words: *bearable, makeover, illuminated, dominance, accessible*; the colloquial expressions including: *littered with children's toys, go to your room, seems much of a threat, whatever happened to...?*. The list comprises terms which they had never used before, such being the case of *decentralisation*, a term belonging to a formal and academic register, rarely encountered, if ever, in spoken English. Formal language was out of reach from the start for some students, due to their constant contact with oral English and limited exposure to the academic levels of the language. This is due to their manner of learning English from extracurricular contexts, rather than the academic, formal one. Another step in explaining and expanding the meaning of certain words involved tracing its origin and related terms. In this respective case, students assessed that *decentralisation* is a term derived from *central/centrum*, to which were added two different particles, named affixes, namely the prefix *de-*, having the meaning indicating *removal* or *reversal*, as well as the suffix *-isation*, normally used to create a noun of *process*. The final result was that students were able to understand that the combination suggests a structural shift away from a central authority or

point of control. This fact would later help them when connecting multiple words within the review.

The following step was to extend the initial framework to a more complex dynamics for students, in order to stress upon the fact that by choosing *decentralisation* instead of *spreading out* or *distributing*, the reviewer tried to sustain a certain frame for their discourse, characterised by an analytical and intellectual tone which reinforces the sociological nature of the discussion. This *modus operandi* perpetuated throughout the discussion, as students managed to create their own analyses, while discussing and debating their findings with the ones of their peers. The transition from a linguistic analysis led to an interactional perspective, assessing meaning in context: “Key to that decentralisation of the home – and the implied shift of power within it – is the advent of central heating”. Students managed to understand with the help of dictionaries and group discussion that the author made a clear reference to the redistribution of control within households, moving from a single dominant space to multiple accessible areas. The implicit meaning has facilitated, as the term suggested a shift in the domestic environment or a greater change in the domestic life, drawing a clear parallel meant to enhance wider social changes by taking into account numerous factors but focusing upon shifting family dynamics and the great impact of technological influence on it.

The desired effect was to differentiate students from the general readers, in order to increase their vocabulary knowledge. Consequently, for ordinary readers, *decentralisation* may evoke ideas of social progress and increased individual freedom, whereas for the more trained eye, the word invites a deeper analysis of power structures within domestic settings. Such was the case with the students, who, at the end of the first focus group, were able to understand the critic’s choice of the word *decentralisation* as a method of strengthening the argument presented within the text by creating a direct connection to a larger social and historical shift rather than a simple, passive change in household arrangements.

Additional terms and phrases, including *irrevocably*, *entrenched*, *superiority*, *foibles* and

sociological insights were also discussed to indicate how they are interconnected through their role in creating a certain pattern in communicating narratives concerning the topic of change, on which the critique in the book review was based. They contributed to a broader discussion involving erudite topics such as historical transformation of households and mentalities, resistance to change of different social classes and the way modern perspectives evaluate the past alongside its key points in development. For instance, one of the main themes in the review expanded upon the topic of how domestic habits and language change *irrevocably*, meaning there is no returning to previous norms, the critic stating the following: “The message is that even the language of the home has changed *irrevocably*: airing cupboards are going the same way as drawing rooms”. As a result, the term *irrevocably* was assessed as a unit underscoring the permanent character of temporary shifts both in language and culture. It was suggested the fact that terms from a similar group to which *parlour* and *airing cupboard* belong were closer to archaisms rather than be used in actual, current topics of conversation, a phenomenon which aligned with events detailing about broader societal transformations, in which technological and cultural developments redefine the manner in which domestic enclosures, as well as homestead-related phenomena are perceived.

Other terms have been deemed even more ambiguous, due to the manner in which they have been employed in the review. While some changes are inevitable, others face resistance to different cultural phenomena due to entrenched social norms, highlighted in the review the social belief concerning children necessitating fresh air for a well development: “It was a belief so *entrenched* that even a voice of dissent merely argued that in winter (...) healthy child only needs about three hours a day in the open air, as long as the day and night nursery windows are always open”. The employment of the word *entrenched* was also brought into discussion, as it suggested a deeply rooted, unquestioned tradition, almost acting as an unwritten rule stipulated for the previous, actual and succeeding generation. This was perceived as custom which persisted throughout years, despite counter arguments and evidence against being revealed by specialists

in the domain, illustrating the manner in which societal norms, from the most harmless to the most excessive ones, have been difficult to change or to debunk for centuries.

Progressively, students' perception shifted, as they began to familiarise with the approach and thus, their general understanding of words, stating that literary critique must indeed exert a certain power over their capacity of understanding and correctly assessing meaning in these parts of the exam due to the enrichment of their personal, vocabulary knowledge supported by the contact with these reviews.

For instance, the usage of *foibles* instead of the terms *flaws* was found to convey a more humorous and light-hearted tone: "Rather more clear is the reason why a 1902 Teasmade failed to catch on: 'when the alarm clock triggered the switch, a match was struck, lighting a spirit stove under the kettle'. This word choice softens critique and adds an element of nostalgia, while instead of simply ridiculing or praising historical trends, the reviewer chose to bring to the spotlight sociological insights, as seen in its praise for Highmore's approach: "For the most part, he's an engaging and quirky guide, dispensing sociological insights without jargon", emphasizes the importance of contextual analysis rather than the hasty judgment. The approach was clearly understood, and thus, the point of focus was more complex, replacing the mere action of pointing out that past customs seem odd today, the review takes its responsibility for encouraging readers to understand the reason behind the existence of such customs.

The discussion session of this focus group was followed by completion of a worksheet, acting as a progress report for the vocabulary knowledge accumulated by the students. Furthermore, other focus group sessions managed to enhance the power of literary critique over the vocabulary of candidates.

Another issue we focused upon was the use of specialised and technical vocabulary, which pose difficulties for students. In this respect, the review incorporates terms from various disciplines, including sociology, cultural studies, technological innovation, household improvement, historical development and literary references.

First of all, the category of sociology and culture include elements such as *domestic democracy*, *decentralisation*, *internationalism in taste*, *societal changes*. These terms are the tools with the help of which the author theorizes upon the manner in which homesteads reflect broader societal changes that expand its territory and innovation over the classical personal or aesthetic spaces as topic of general discussion. Concepts such as *domestic democracy*, *decentralisation* and *internationalism in taste* shifts the discussion in a slightly different direction, as domestic democracy reflects upon the creation of a more equitable distribution of resources, technology and power overall, within the household. Additionally, technological registers were studied at large, for the students to get acquainted with the more accessible specialised terms, emerging from the innovations within the household environments and the technological advancements. Terms such as *gas-powered fridges*, *dishmaster*, *spirit stove*, *airing cupboards* have made the topic of this part of discussion, as the review incorporates these terms in order to reflect historical advancements and shifts in home utility, convenience and safety standards. These units of meaning have been brought into analysis with the aim of highlighting the manner in which technological progress has shaped everyday life, as a vital tool aiding ordinary people perform simple actions related to their home, namely how to cook, clean and organise their living spaces within their houses.

By referencing these terms, the review not only creates a space of documentation, engaging the students and stirring up their curiosity, both necessary when studying vocabulary data, but also uphold the capacity of criticising the probability of some technologies to fail due to impracticality, inefficiency or evolving consumer needs, topic considered extremely resourceful when answering some of the questions offered in the given task. This perspective creates common ground for the two worlds by connecting domestic history with larger themes of technological progress, stressing upon key-topics such as marketing influence and the ever-changing nature of daily life.

Lastly, historical references, accompanied by literary mentioning of period and movements have

constructed another path of research for students, as they felt the need to study syntagms and terms including *Victorian knick-knacks*, *parlour*, *Housewife magazine* and others. Linguistic choices in this sense are meant to reveal how historical objects, and items of information reflect broader societal changes, as well as disruptions within certain contexts. Their natural manner of occurring in the review not only provides helpful insights into the styles practiced in the past, but also, it maintains a stable function of enriching the vocabulary knowledge of students by exposing them to terms with emotional charge, embedded in historical, cultural and sociological contexts.

For instance, the reference to *Victorian knick-knacks* suggests that these non-essential decorative items acted, in fact as associated units of meaning in close connection to aesthetic excess and nostalgia. Consequently, the contrast presented in the review, with regards to the opposition between Victorian-era decor and modern living rooms has the main function of insisting upon a shift in taste and customs, from formal, display-oriented homes to casual, functional spaces, whereas its assessment in the process of vocabulary enriching was easily determined. Its role, similar to numerous other terms, was to introduce students into the realms of historical home aesthetics, broadening their understanding of how material culture reflects social attitudes, stressing upon the clear need for an explanation upon how language evolves; more specifically, while *knick-knacks* is still used today, it carries different connotations depending on the era and context, an almost identical process to the other terms discussed. The term “parlour”, alternatively, refers from a historical point of view to a formal sitting room used for receiving guests, a common feature in middle and upper-class homes during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Similar to the terms discussed previously, *parlour* teaches students about semantic change. It may be characterised by the manner in which words can fade from everyday use as the concepts they represent become obsolete, eventually forgotten once an era ends or if an idea loses its popularity. These terms are meant to introduce a sort of sociological connection between

language and lifestyle, phenomenon helping students understand linguistic patterns and their evolution, while reflecting social transformations.

Lastly, social issues and delicate perspective connecting to those were brought to the surface, as the term housewives appeared in the title of a highly regarded magazine back in the day. *Housewife magazine*, as mentioned, was a cultural expression of an entire era, from its position of a mid-20th-century publication. Originally designed to aim at women, it was the Bible of social mannerisms, offering advice on domestic life, family care and traditional homemaking role, issues the traditional wife trend nowadays tries to stress upon, encouraging women to return to their initial position within the society and the family. The quote extracted from the magazine and introduced in the review “men make houses, women make homes” reflects rigid gender roles of the time, being able to critique past social norms and to question traditional family dynamics then and now.

Students were quick to recognise this concept, as it circulated around social media platforms, especially on TikTok and Instagram, being turned into a famous trend by models such as Nara Smith¹ or former ballet dancers, as Hana Neeleman, a.k.a the Ballerina farm². It introduced students to historical perspectives on gender roles and media influence, ideas contradicting with the overall appearance of the trend today, given the economy, social right and struggles on gender equality. We notice that these data combined helped them recognize how social attitudes are reinforced through language, expanding their understanding of periodicals as cultural artifacts. Additionally, we remarked the risks of misunderstanding as the two realities, the one in the mid-50s and the current one circulating in society might clash. However, the proper comparison between the two made it simple for students to assess the real meaning behind the concept.

The review presented a balanced mix of formal and informal language, historical and modern vocabulary and technical and figurative expressions, creating an engaging yet accessible food for

¹ <https://www.instagram.com/naraaziza/?hl=en>, accessed February 11th, 2025.

² <https://www.instagram.com/ballerinafarm/?hl=en>, accessed February 11th, 2025.

thought, making it an excellent resource for enriching vocabulary and enhancing linguistic dexterity.

The adjacent manner in which we have guided the students on the process of enhancing vocabulary knowledge stressed upon the general understanding of connotation and its involvement into the texts, as book reviews provide context for words, helping students grasp their meanings, nuances and appropriate usage. This stage led to an increase in the critical thinking, encouraging them to analyse the manner in which language is used, aiming to improve their own perspective and ability in understanding meaning and context. Additionally, by observing how reviewers construct arguments, students have identified patterns used in varied sentence structures, being able to incorporate similar techniques in their writing.

3. Book Reviews as Persuasive Tools

In order to use book reviews as persuasive tools, ones for creating a bridge between language and critical assessment for students, we have selected the text from part 5 within the first mock test, which was the same for both groups, despite the temporal gap. We asked the students to read twice by themselves and after that, to look for unknown terms. They selected a wide range of terms, including: *episodic, nonlinear, antagonist, foil, archetype, imagery, tone, diction, Existential themes, social commentary, allegorical representation, Marxist*. After identifying the specialised words, students were asked to infer the possible meaning from the text, while categorising the words into morphological groups, including nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc. They observed that, due to the context which was easily described and identified, they find quite easy to assess the morphological value of each of these words, given also the spelling of some of them, while other categories were facilitated by the additional knowledge concerning endings and structures. As for the meanings, they were more difficult to guess, some were discovered without any help, but other posed serious issues. For instance, in the text, the level of adjectives is abundant, as the text is a book review, characterising the strengths and weaknesses

of the writing, process usually accomplished with a large variety of adjectives. As previously mentioned, the language employed vivid and nuanced adjectives such as *entertaining*, *informative*, *engaging*, *quirky* and *disturbing*, words perceived by students as liable to help readers to grasp subtle distinctions in tone and meaning and to improve their ability to use precise vocabulary. In this respect, *quirky* and *engaging* led students to create associations between familiar words and these two more formal options.

At the level of nouns, another issue was the usage of extensive references to different specialists or other names of writers, unknown to individuals with a relatively limited general knowledge concerning the domain of literature. Consequently, by referencing figures like Billy Williams, Norman Wisdom and Margaret Thatcher, along with historical events and trends, the review broadens their contextual vocabulary. Other references contribute to the formation of comparisons and analogies, acting as figurative representation of reality in different stages of development. The review creates parallels between past and present household dynamics, using terms like *domestic democracy*, *decentralization of the home* and *irrational fears*, acting as comparisons familiarising students with abstract concepts and sociological terminology. Being exposed to such concepts, students are capable of enriching not only the vocabulary, but the general understanding of the messages, while stimulating free will and the expression of personal opinions.

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This exposure helps students understand how to articulate opinions with sophistication. In this respect, these ideas are closely related to more complex phenomena occurring in the process, such as the need for critical analysis and self-argumentation, both being founded upon the general knowledge concerning vocabulary enrichment.

Furthermore, persuasion, as a means of communicating intention and opinions, has a fluid existence in book reviews, being often supported by logical reasoning and critical arguments. In this respect, there are lexical and stylistic markers triggering different responses, which need to be correctly identified and studied. Reviewers present both positive and negative aspects of a book, and in order to do so, the authors chose their words carefully. No word is placed randomly, as they use words expressing agreement or critique, some examples including *compelling*, *flawed*, *well-structured* or *redundant*. By reading such analyses, students learn how to structure their arguments and express complex thoughts effectively.

The book review submitted to analysis includes words ranging from *parlour*, *airing cupboard* and *drawing room*, to more modern literary items including *iPads*, *laptops* and *mobiles*. This illustrates language evolution and helps students recognise shifting lexical trends, as well as the existence of smaller groups of meaning within the same stylistic area. Additionally, there are numerous tendencies in terms of patterns which had to be discussed at this stage. The fact that numerous pieces of critique compare a book to similar works or authors, acts as an important element, motivating students to recognise thematic and stylistic patterns, even to understand the structure and to assess, in their turn, the value of different pieces of art with their own words, but using the terms specific to this particular activity. For instance, expressions such as *reminiscent of Orwell's dystopian vision* or *as gripping as a Hitchcock thriller* are linguistic items

introducing students to contextual vocabulary and literary connections, whereas the use of quotations and exemplifications may encourage more extensive research when inquiring about meaning and form.

As observed from different textual samples, critics display repetitive behaviour, as they normally include direct quotes from the book to support their opinions, highlighting their ideas, a persuasive technique derived for Logos, known also under the name of proof. This exposure to a multitude of passages that are rigorously written and the contact with a wide variety of stylistic choices enriches students' vocabulary by demonstrating word usage in context, as well as meaning selection and shifting within a given context.

4. Research Findings and Data Interpretation

During the process of data collection, we made the following observations, detailing the results and the evolution of the participants, as we may observe from the following tables and charts.

The first 2 tables concern the group from Bacau, as they were monitored for 4 sessions in achieving the necessary knowledge for performing well in these parts of the exam.

Student initials	Results in Part 5 (single review, multiple choice question)_ session 1	Results in Part 5 (single review, multiple choice question)_ session 2	Results in Part 5 (single review, multiple choice question)_ session 3	Results in Part 5 (single review, multiple choice question)_ session 4
M.M.E	3 items out of 6 (50%)	3 items out of 6 (50%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)
D.I.	1 item out of 6 (16,67%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)	6 item out of 6 (100%)
P.A.	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)
D.M.	0 items out of 6 (0%)	2 items out of 6 (33,33%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)
P.M.E.	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)
T.R.C.	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)
H.V.	3 items out of 6 (50%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)

Table 3. The results obtained by the candidates enrolled from Bacau, in Part 5, during the 4 mock tests
(November 2024 to February 2025)

Student initials	Results in Part 6 (4 reviews, matching task)_session 1	Results in Part 6 (4 reviews, matching task)_session 2	Results in Part 6 (4 reviews, matching task)_session 3	Results in Part 6 (4 reviews, matching task)_session 4
M.M.E	2 items out of 4 (50%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)
D.I.	0 items out of 4 (50%)	1 item out of 4 (25%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)
P.A.	1 item out of 4 (25%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)
D.M.	0 items out of 4 (0%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)
P.M.E.	2 items out of 4 (50%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)
T.R.C.	3 items out of 4 (75%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)
H.V.	1 item out of 4 (25%)	3 item out of 4 (75%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)	4 item out of 4 (100%)

Table 4. The results obtained by the candidates enrolled from Bacau, in Part 6, during the 4 mock tests (November 2024 to February 2025)

The data collected from four successive mock test sessions taking place between the beginning of November 2024 and the end of February 2025 illustrates a clear direction of improvement among the students preparing for the CAE (C1) language exam. The analysis, as shown in these tables, focused on two key areas: (1) the performance in part 5 (single review, multiple-choice questions), (2) the performance in part 6 (four reviews, matching task).

It was clear that there were some initial struggles, as seen in the case of two students. Additionally, the majority of students scored below 70%, with some performing significantly lower, whereas the highest-scoring student managed to get 5 out of 6 correct answers (83.33%), suggesting an initial disparity in comprehension skills within the group, even though the results of the placement test were in the same range of knowledge.

In this respect, there is clear progress observed especially for students whose performance, at the beginning of the sessions was very low. After a discussion on the main challenges, we have reached an agreement analysing the reviews together, whilst preparing materials and lists of terms and specialised concepts concerning book reviews. We adopted a strategy based on the

enrichment of vocabulary by offering the students the possibility of interacting multiple times during a session with different samples discussed together. To this purpose, we have selected random book reviews from the American sites of reviews, in order to create a similar practical framework for the students to experiment.

By December, the average performance increased, with several students achieving above 66% accuracy. Students who had initially struggled showed slow, but steady improvement, as they had to work on additional samples, in comparison to their other mates. Their performance showed improvement, though progress was still uneven.

By January 2025, five students achieved scores of 83% or higher, indicating substantial growth in their ability to analyse and interpret book reviews.

The final stage showed even more significant progress, as four students achieved perfect scores (6/6, 100%), while the rest scored no lower than 66%.

One student, who initially scored 16.67%, showed remarkable improvement, reaching 100% by January 2025. Due to their involvement in studying and assessing language and meaning within various book reviews, the managed to shift the initial result to a perfect score.

On the other hand, other candidates consistently demonstrated high performance, maintaining scores throughout the sessions.

With respect to the performance displayed within the second part of the exam, the results have a somewhat resemblance to the formerly discussed part. The first session demonstrated inconsistent performance, with some students managing 50% accuracy, while for others overall average accuracy was around 35%, indicating that students found the task of synthesising multiple perspectives more challenging than single review comprehension, despite the fact that, at a first glance, the latter task seemed shorter and easier to be solved, in comparison to the former.

The second session came with a few encouraging results, as more students achieved 50% accuracy or higher, a fact which demonstrates a developing ability to identify thematic links

across multiple reviews due to a closer contact with the language of literary critique. In this respect, some students' scores improved from 25% to 75%, marking a significant cognitive shift; their initial poor performance could be also linked to the lack of contact with such tasks.

By the last session, five students achieved a perfect score (4/4, 100%), and none scored below 75% accuracy; these results suggest that the candidates became proficient in recognising underlying themes as they began to be more acquainted with the pattern, the structure, the discourse and the overall language of book reviews.

Overall, concerning the evolution of the first group, the one from Bacau, we may mention some key aspects, starting with the fact that the candidates exhibited the most significant improvement in part 6, suggesting that exposure to multiple reviews enhanced their ability to compare and contrast perspectives, in comparison to their performance in part 5. Also, the structured focus on contextual vocabulary acquisition and critical reading strategies contributed to steady progress in both sections, whilst the overall exposure to literary critique enhanced their abilities and developed their critical thinking, forcing them to analyse and correctly assess meaning within books reviews. Certain trainees who initially struggled with comprehension later showed remarkable improvement, due to iterative exposure to book reviews, targeted discussions and vocabulary-building exercises based on various samples selected from the resourceful internet sites. The progressive structure of the study reinforced lexical retention, leading to an almost perfect performance in the final session. These being mentioned, the presented data strongly suggests that consistent engagement with book reviews has significantly improved students' analytical reading skills and vocabulary acquisition, fact will be explored in the following sections, when navigating the entire process development in this instructional incursion, all based upon entries and comments made for each task and additional practice development by the candidates. The main point extracted from this section only reinforces the importance of literary critique as a tool for linguistic and cognitive development in exam preparation contexts.

In assessing, observing and interpreting the progress of the second group, from Focsani, as seen

in the following table, we need to mention that this group started courses one session later than the ones from Bacau, which meant that their progress will have a shorter period of observation, namely three sessions instead of four.

Student initials	Results in Part 5 (single review, multiple choice question)_ session 1	Results in Part 5 (single review, multiple choice question)_ session 2	Results in Part 5 (single review, multiple choice question)_ session 3
L.A.	3 items out of 6 (50%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)
B.M.C.	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)
C.T.	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)
C.A.	2 items out of 6 (33,33%)	2 items out of 6 (33,33%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)
B.D.M.	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)
R.V.E.	3 items out of 6 (50%)	3 items out of 6 (50%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)
B.M.E.	3 items out of 6 (50%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	5 items out of 6 (83,33%)
I.C.E.	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)	6 items out of 6 (100%)
C.A.	2 items out of 6 (33,33%)	2 items out of 6 (33,33%)	4 items out of 6 (66,67%)

Table 5. The results obtained by the candidates enrolled from Focsani, in Part 5, during the 3 mock tests (December 2024 to February 2025)

Student initials	Results in Part 6 (4 reviews, matching task)_session 1	Results in Part 6 (4 reviews, matching task)_ session 2	Results in Part 6 (4 reviews, matching task)_session 3
L.A.	2 items out of 4 (50%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)
B.M.C.	2 items out of 4 (50%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)
C.T.	3 items out of 4 (75%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)	4 item out of 4 (100%)
C.A.	0 items out of 4 (0%)	1 item out of 4 (25%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)
B.D.M.	3 items out of 4 (75%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)	4 items out of 4 (100%)
R.V.E.	2 items out of 4 (50%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)
B.M.E.	1 item out of 4 (25%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)
I.C.E.	1 item out of 4 (25%)	2 items out of 4 (50%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)
C.A.	1 item out of 4 (25%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)	3 items out of 4 (75%)

Table 6. The results obtained by the candidates enrolled from Focsani, in Part 6, during the 3 mock tests (December 2024 to February 2025)

Similar to the first group, the data offered useful insights regarding the impact of the language of literary critique upon the manner in which students enrich their vocabulary. In this respect, the first session established that were different struggles, as scores ranged from 33.33% to 83.33%, with most students performing within the 50-66% range. The lowest score was only 2/6 (33.33%), indicating difficulties in comprehension and inference making, in comparison to the highest initial score (83.33%), demonstrating strong analytical skills from the start, therefore, a more skilful manner of exercising their vocabulary knowledge.

In contrast to the first group, there has been a visible improvement registered in the second session, as the following results sustain this particular statement. Most students improved by 1-2 correct answers, with 2 of them reaching perfect scores (6/6, 100%), whereas another 3 improved their accuracy, showing increased confidence in textual analysis. By contrast, one student maintained a 33.33% accuracy, suggesting a constant struggle with comprehension. During the

last session, five students achieved perfect scores 6/6 (100%). The performance of the student who recorded the lowest score initially also improved, from 2/6 (33.33%) to 4/6 (66.67%), showing clear gains in reading comprehension. The overall group average increased significantly, with no student scoring below 66.67%. Most students reached 100% accuracy by the final session, showing that repeated exposure to literary analysis significantly enhanced their ability to interpret book reviews. The structured study approach allowed even mid-range performers to reach high proficiency levels.

Concerning part 6, the first stage had a debut similar to the former part, with scores ranging from 0% to 75%, indicating some students' difficulty in synthesising information from multiple sources. The middle session has come with some changes in progress, with five students achieving perfect scores, 4/4 (100%), demonstrating increased ability to identify thematic connections and compare perspectives. Meanwhile, one of the students who seriously struggled initially improved slightly (from 0% to 25%), showing early signs of progress in handling multiple texts, whilst others improved their accuracy from 25% to 50%, reflecting stronger reading comprehension skills. In the last session, six students have achieved high scores (75%-100%), including the one who initially scored 0%, indicating enhanced textual analysis skills. However, the only student whose score did not exceed 50% encountered some difficulties with comparative analysis.

The sharp increase in scores throughout our observative research indicates that the usage of literary critique significantly enriches analytical and comparative skills. Students who initially had difficulties in reading comprehension struggled showed substantial progress over time, confirming the effectiveness of continued exposure to literary critique. The matching task proved initially more challenging than the multiple-choice section, but students adapted well with guided practice.

In summing up all the observations made so far, the hypothesis stating that “the language of literary critique encountered in the book reviews included in the fifth and sixth parts of the

Reading and Use of English sections of the C1 Advanced English exam has a direct impact upon the students' ability of enriching their vocabulary" was confirmed.

5. Conclusions

This research focused upon functions and usage of a particular form of literary critique, the one of book reviews and its involvement in language learning and assessment

This research insisted upon the manner in which digital platforms permit access to critical discourse, allowing young people to engage with analyses acting at a more professional level outside traditional academic spaces. As literary critique bridges the gap between specific groups and the general public, it plays an essential role in developing adolescent literacy by nurturing thoughtful, socially conscious individuals.

This study investigated book reviews as a specialised register through vocabulary research and pattern recognition, focusing on their role in advancing language skills. Register analysis served as the core methodology, studying how variations in style, tone and formality impact the effectiveness of communication in reviews. The research uses a corpus-based approach, drawing on texts from the Cambridge English Advanced exam reading section, more specifically parts 5-6, as primary data, complemented by systematic observation and linguistic analysis.

The study has revealed two vital outcomes, the first acting at the communicative level, in order to prove that exposure to critical registers improves performance on exam tasks involving review analysis; at a more interactive level, reviews create a learning environment which enhances metalinguistic awareness, while enabling students to match terms with contextual meanings while internalizing grammatical and lexical patterns.

These findings highlighted that literary critique's dual role is to act both as an academic subject and a tool for language education. Its structured, yet adaptable nature makes it highly effective in fostering critical thinking and linguistic precision in more academic learning environments.

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