APPRAISAL IN ONLINE REVIEWS OF SOUTH PARK:

A study of engagement resources used in online reviews.

Master's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisin kielellisin keinoin kirjoittaja voi ilmaista mielipiteitään ja arvioitaan verkkoarvosteluissa. Tutkielma pyrkii kuvailemaan keinoja, joilla kirjoittaja huomioi lukijan pyrkiessään omiin tavoitteisiinsa. Tutkielman tarkoituksena on myös tarkastella verkkoarvosteluja genre-analyysin näkökulmasta. Teoreettisesti ja metodologisesti tutkimus nojaa Martinin ja Whiten kehittelemään arvioimisen analyysiin (appraisal analysis). Tutkimusaineisto koostuu neljästätoista televisioanimaation verkkoarvostelusta. Verkkoarvosteluja tarkastellaan laadullisesti.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat kirjoittajan kiinnittävän paljon huomiota suhteeseen lukijan kanssa, mikä ilmenee kirjoittajan käyttämistä kielellisistä keinoista. Tutkimuksen perusteella lukijan ja kirjoittajan suhde on kirjoittajalle vähintään yhtä tärkeää kuin kirjoittajan omien mielipiteiden ilmaisu. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että kirjailija luo itselleen oletuslukijan valitsemillaan keinoilla.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat verkkoarvostelujen sisältävän paljon viittauksia viihdemaailman henkilöihin, elokuviin ja ihmisiin. Viittaukset auttavat kirjoittajaa luomaan verkkoarvosteluille oletuslukijan. Tutkimuksen perusteella linkit ovat verkkoarvosteluille tyypillisiä piirteitä, jotka ohjaavat lukijaa.

Asiasanat – Keywords discourse studies, text analysis, appraisal, genre
Säilytyspaikka – Depository Kielten laitos
Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 INTRODUCTION

The internet offers a vast selection of texts for readers everywhere. One can find an article on almost any subject that comes to mind. The internet presents a possibility for writers everywhere to publish and share their texts. All one really needs is access to a computer and the internet. As a result, the internet is filled with articles, journals, newspapers, blogs and so forth. The internet also works as a new forum for critics all around the world. Traditional reviews have migrated from newspapers to the internet, where writers are given the possibility to easily share their thoughts and ideas with the rest of the world.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the linguistic methods and tools that writers apply to express opinions, to evaluate, to criticize and to complement. My work will focus on online reviews, which are evaluative and argumentative texts to begin with and therefore likely to include different ways of expressing attitudes and opinions. Another reason to study reviews is my own personal interest in different ways of expressing one's opinions and in ways of persuading the reader to believe that what one is arguing is in fact the truth. Furthermore, I am interested in the textual characteristics of online reviews as a genre and especially how these characteristics are constructed in the vocabulary and grammar of the reviews.

 Both the theoretical and the methodological framework of this study rely heavily on the theory of systemic functional grammar. The main field of study I am working in is discourse analysis, more specifically appraisal analysis. Appraisal analysis is still a relatively new area in discourse analysis and there is a lot of room for new studies. My study contributes to research in these areas in the sense that even though there is research about reviews and especially about literary criticism, there is relatively little research about online reviews and their linguistic characteristics. Accordingly, the

practical application of this study is to offer information about the genre of online reviews and its characteristics.

As my material I will use reviews on the animated television show South Park featured on the IGN Entertainment website (IGN: South Park). I chose this material partly because there are not many studies available about online reviews and partly because of my own interest in South Park. I find the show itself very provocative, politically incorrect, sometimes immature and even stupid but at the same time hilariously funny. As a fan myself, reviews on this show seem like set of data that will not become boring quite as fast as reviews on a show unknown to me might. Furthermore, as a fan I have some understanding of the fans' reactions to the show and of the expectations that each episode of the show faces. This kind of background knowledge makes it easier to recognize whether the writer acknowledges these expectations or not and whether they affect his writing or not.

Computer-mediated communication and online reviews as a genre are discussed in chapter 2. The concept of appraisal is introduced and explored in chapter 3. Previous studies on appraisal and online reviews are discussed in chapter 4. In chapter 5 the methodological framework of the study and research problems are introduced. The results of the analysis are presented in chapter 6. In chapter 7 the results of the analysis are discussed in relation to the research questions. Conclusions of what could have been done differently and what is left for future research are drawn in chapter 8.

2 REVIEWS IN COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

In this chapter I will first discuss the concept of computer-mediated communication. Genres in online settings are discussed in the second section.

2.1 Computer-mediated communication

The internet is full of different kinds of texts. There are online newspapers, blogs, chat rooms, advertisement, product reviews, informational sites and so forth available for people to access. These all can be stylistically very different and serve different kinds of communicative purposes. There are websites on the internet intended for smaller groups as well as websites meant for larger audiences. Social networking sites have recently become more popular and more common as a way of connecting to others. There are services online which are specifically designed for communicating with others around the globe. These are all aspects of computer-mediated communication.

Barnes (2003: 4) states that computer-mediated communication was originally described as a form of electronic written communication, but expanded to include new software developments as technologies advanced. Barnes (2003: 4) defines computer-mediated communication as a term that "is used to refer to a wide range of technologies that facilitate both human communication and the interactive sharing of information through computer networks, including e-mail, discussion groups, newsgroups, chat, instant messages, and Web pages". In my view this describes well the different aspects related to computer-mediated communication, as it includes both the technological aspect and the communicative and social aspects.

2.2 Genres in computer-mediated communication

Giltrow and Stein (2009) discuss computer-mediated communication in terms of genre. They see computer-mediated communication as an ideal field for studying the concept of genre, because it "both overturns and reinstates those aggregations of discourse features which indicate function; it both defies and confirms the familiarity which sparks recognition of discourse types". They note that even though it may seem that there are several new genres in the internet, there are situations where it is disputable whether the genre is a new one or merely an old one in different surroundings. (Giltrow and Stein 2009: 1-2.) One could expect this to be true of online reviews as well, as it is sometimes difficult to say whether online reviews form a new genre or if they should be considered as traditional reviews in new surroundings. Nevertheless, the online environment probably has had an effect on the genre. Giltrow and Stein (2009: 9) state that the internet creates a new frame for communication that affects the field of genre and which has other secondary consequences, for example new standards and perceptions of audience.

Giltrow and Stein (2009: 9) discuss some main issues in genre theory when working with online genres. One issue is whether a genre is to be considered a new one just because the medium has changed. Another issue is whether the loss of generic identity is an inevitable consequence of the genre's migration to the internet and at what point is a genre considered to have lost its identity. One needs to consider whether online genres systematically have characteristics that are not found in more traditional genres. Also, as some genres are seen as having successfully migrated into the internet it is worthwhile to look for systematic changes in those genres as well. One also needs to think about the way possible new genres relate to previous ones. (Giltrow and Stein 2009: 9.) When it comes to this study, one can consider the differences between newspaper reviews and online reviews on television shows; even though both are reviews on television, one can expect there to be differences in style, layout, audience and so forth.

According to Giltrow and Stein (2009: 10), traditional genres, especially written ones, have been considered to have a wide applicability. However, internet genres are not as general because they are more tied to the norms of their online communities even if they are globally accessible. This study focuses on online reviews of *South Park* posted on a large website called IGN. Though the website is available to everyone, the website does have its own target audience to whom the reviews have been written. As a result, an outsider to the community would not have the same kind of reading experience. Also, the reader would had to have either known about the site or been looking for online reviews or perhaps information about *South Park* in order to find the reviews at all.

Domsch (2009) discusses the changes in the genre of the literary review within computer-mediated communication. He offers interesting views to critical genres and especially what he has to say about reviews as a genre could well be applied to online reviews of an animated television series as well. Domsch (2009: 223) sees genres as social and linguistic practices and follows Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas by stating that genres are intrinsically dialogic and intertextual in their structure. He sees dialogism as important, since reviews always relate themselves to another genre, for example in this study the online reviews are related to an animated television series. Domsch adds that reviews are dialogic in two directions; the review is directed both at the reader and towards the earlier text or, in the case of this study, the episode it was written about. Domsch (2009: 224) notes that the dialogue with the reviewed material (text, episode) is more straightforward as reviews substantially drawn on quotations. He sees this as corruptive to the genre, as the reviewed genre and its style can sometimes affect the style of the review. The use of quotations and whether or not the reviewed genre has affected the style of the reviews are interesting issues for this study as well.

According to Domsch (2009: 227-228), the genre of literary criticism or review did not change too much when it migrated to the internet and the changes were subtle, even though as electronic texts reviews are copied, linked to and commented upon more than its printed version. Also, while traditional reviews in valued publications are more

generally accepted as the truthful opinion, reviews in electronic publications are more likely marginalized. According to Domsch (2009: 225-226), the review's authority relies on its generic framing, that is, the situational context, the layout and the visibility of the text. Especially important is the name of the paper where the review has been published. Domsch (2009: 228) adds that there is very little research on literary criticism on the internet available, partly because the printed version also seems to lack appreciation and partly because research does not seem worthwhile as online genres may change rapidly and radically. These are interesting comments in terms of this study. If one wants to analyse online reviews as a genre, one needs to consider how the migration of traditional reviews to the internet has changed them. Also, one could explore whether certain websites have gained more authority than others and the kinds of results this would have on the genre. Furthermore, the quick and radical changes in the online environment make it a challenging genre to study.

Domsch (2009: 224) notes that a review always strives to gain critical authority. Domsch (2009: 225) states that due to generic conventions, a review is expected to try to persuade the reader of a certain opinion. This is done by certain rhetorical structures, for example citations, value judgements based on general standards of taste and comparisons with already highly appreciated texts. As a genre online reviews always include the evaluation of a thing: a book, a film, a video game or, in the case of this study, a television show. The writers of reviews use certain rhetorical structures to express these evaluations and opinions and to present them as valid. The appraisal framework provides a tool for studying these rhetorical structures as it focuses on evaluation. The appraisal framework will be explored in the following chapter.

3 THE APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of the present study is further explored in this chapter. First appraisal theory is situated in the fields of systemic functional linguistics and discourse analysis. The concept of appraisal theory is then introduced and followed by more detailed description of the theory. The appraisal framework provides both the theoretical framework and the analytical tools for studying evaluation in texts. The appraisal framework defines and describes different theoretical categories and subcategories, introduces different kinds of evaluations as well as ways for identifying them and separating them from each other. Therefore the appraisal framework presents a systematic way of analysing online reviews, which characteristically involve evaluation.

3.1 Appraisal in systemic functional linguistics

Often it seems there are as many definitions of discourse analysis as there are discourse analysts. This study relies on definitions of discourse and terms of appraisal from Martin and Rose (2003) and Martin and White (2005). When it comes to defining discourse, the present study relies on the definition of Martin and Rose (2003: 1-4) which focuses on the social characteristics of discourse, in other words they see discourse as social activity that is constructed through texts. They view clauses, texts and cultures as different levels of social processes. This kind of approach is similar to my own views and related to the kind of material used in this study; online reviews act out a social activity, that is, the act of evaluating something and more importantly, sharing that evaluation with others. Martin and Rose's view of discourse analysis is based on the framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL). In their view, discourse analysis means both the analysis of grammar and of social activity by tools taken from grammarians and social theorists. Martin and White's approach to appraisal theory, a model of evaluation, is also based on

the paradigm of systemic functional linguistics developed by M.A.K Halliday and his colleagues.

According to Halliday (1994: xv) discourse analysis always works on one of two possible levels, it either aims to understand a text or to evaluate it. The lower level refers to understanding the text, showing how and why the text means what it does through linguistic analysis. The higher level refers to evaluating the text, showing whether or not the text is successful in its purposes and why. This requires an interpretation of both text and context and the relationship between the two. (Halliday 1994: xv) The present study aims to understand online reviews as texts, to show how the evaluation is performed and to explain the reasons why it is performed in that particular way.

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a broad framework on language and grammar that has taken a couple of decades to develop. It is based on the framework of functional grammar by M.A.K. Halliday. Halliday (1994: xiii) states that the framework of functional grammar is functional in three different ways: it interprets texts, the system and elements of linguistic structures. Functional grammar focuses on how language is used, that is, everything in functional grammar can be explained through how language is used. According to Halliday (1994: xiii) the functional components of language are components of meaning. These kinds of meaning are called metafunctions. There are three kinds of meaning: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational meaning refers to understanding the environment and the interpersonal to acting on the others in the environment. According to Halliday (1994: xiii) the third kind of meaning, textual meaning "breaths relevance" into the interpersonal and ideational. Another important aspect of of functional grammar is that language is divided into three levels, or strata: semantics, grammar and phonology. (Halliday 1994: xiv)

 According to Martin and Rose (2003: 3) systemic functional linguistics is based on two major perspectives. Firstly there are three levels of language: grammar, discourse and social context. Secondly language has three different functions: to enact relationships, to

represent experiences and to organize discourse. These functions present the metafunctions which Halliday explains through the three kinds of meaning. Ideational refers to representing experiences, textual to organizing discourse and interpersonal to enacting relationships..Out of the three modes of meaning presented in systemic functional linguistics; the textual, the ideational and the interpersonal, both Martin and White (2005) and Martin and Rose (2003) focus on the interpersonal. This study also aims to investigate the kind of effect the relationship between reader and writer has on evaluations made in online reviews. An important aspect of appraisal theory is indeed the relationship between the reader and the writer and how they communicate within the text, that is, the interpersonal meaning. These aspects of appraisal theory will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2 Appraisal- defining the concept

The concept of appraisal is discussed by Martin and Rose (2003: 22-65) who introduce appraisal as a part of different discourse systems when discussing attitudes, expressing opinions and evaluation in texts. Martin and Rose (2003: 22) describe appraisal as a system of interpersonal meanings whose resources writers and speakers use to negotiate social relationships and define it as follows: "Appraisal is concerned with evaluation: the kind of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned. " Broadly speaking this is the definition of appraisal that this study follows.

Based on the terms from Martin and Rose (2003), Martin and White (2005: 1-2) present several views into what is meant by appraisal and appraisal theory. Appraisal theory intends to explain how writers are present in their texts; how do they relate to their material and their readers. Appraisal attempts to describe the kinds of methods writers have to accept and refuse, praise and detest, cheer and put down and how they manipulate their readers to do the same. Through appraisal, linguists can try to find out how writers use texts to construct communities and what kind of methods there are to

express emotions and tastes. Appraisal deals with how writers make up identities for themselves in texts, how they present themselves in relation to their readers and how they construct an audience for their text. With regard to this study, the appraisal theory offers a systematic way to study both the evaluations in online reviews and the ways in which the writer communicates with the reader.

Martin and Rose (2003: 24-25) divide appraisal into three categories: attitudes, amplification and sources. Using slightly different terms, Martin and White (2005: 35) divide appraisal into attitude, graduation and engagement. By attitude both Martin and Rose and Martin and White refer to feelings, judgements and evaluations. In Martin and Rose, amplification refers to the intensity of the evaluation where as in Martin and White this is called graduation. Though attitude and graduation are not discussed in this study, they are presented briefly in order to give an overall picture of the appraisal framework. Also, these two categories offer several possibilities for future research. Martin and Rose simply refer to the sources of attitudes, where as Martin and White refer to it as engagement; that is, who is doing the evaluation and how these evaluations are presented to the reader. As I am interested in the ways in which writers try to affect their readers, the focus of this study is on the category of engagement.

 Definitions from both Martin and Rose (2003) and Martin and White (2005) are introduced. As Martin and White (2005) rely on Martin and Rose (2003) in their definitions of the three categories, both definitions are discussed. The terms and definitions in Martin and White (2005) are in my view more developed and clearer, especially when it comes to the category of engagement. Therefore the terms introduced by Martin and White, attitude, graduation and engagement, will be used in this study. The three categories will be further discussed in the following sections.

3.3 Attitude

Martin and Rose (2003: 23-24) further divide attitudes into three different categories: people's feelings, people's character and the value of things. They use the term affect to refer to resources for expressing feelings, judgement to refer to resources for judging character and appreciation to refer to resources for valuing the worth of things. In the case of the online reviews used in this study, these categories could refer to for example evaluations of the story line or characters of the show as well as how the episode being reviewed made the writer feel. Martin and Rose (2003: 25-27) state that when expressing feelings people can choose between positive and negative affect and also whether they wish to express their feelings directly or implicitly. Describing people's feelings is very common especially in narratives and the contrast between good and bad is usually easy to distinguish. However, when it comes to direct and implicit expressions of feelings writer's have more options, for example, referring directly to a mental state, describing behaviour that expresses emotion, describing unusual behaviour that expresses emotion indirectly or describing emotion through metaphor. Martin and White (2005: 42-43) make the same distinctions to affect, judgement and appreciation. They also mark that we register positive and negative feelings, for example feeling happy or sad. In terms of judgement, they state that it is about admiring, criticizing, praising and condemning others' behaviour. According to Martin and White (2005: 43), appreciation deals with evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena.

As mentioned earlier, attitude is divided into affect, judgement and appreciation. These are all realized through certain grammatical structures. As Martin and White (2005: 58-61) point out, attitude is typically grammatically realised through adjectives. They offer grammatical frames through which affect, judgement and appreciation can be distinguished. According to Martin and White (2005: 45-46) affect can be realised by modifying participants and processes (*a sad captain, the captain left sadly*), through affective mental and behavioural processes (*the captain was sad)* and by using modal

adjuncts(*sadly, he had to go)*. Affect is also realized through grammatical metaphors which include nominalised realizations of qualities; *joy, sadness, sorrow*, and processes; *grief, sobs*. (Martin and White 2005: 45-46) According to Martin and White (2005: 58) a distinguishing frame for affect would be a relational attributive process with a conscious participant involving the verb *feel*, for example *I feel happy.*

 Judgements are concerned with either social esteem (normality, capacity, tenacity) or social sanction (veracity, propriety). Grammatically these judgements can be expressed via lexicalisations, mood and modality. (Martin and White 2005: 52-56) Illustrative realizations for judgements of social esteem are for example *natural, familiar, odd, peculiar* (normality), *healthy, clever, slow, foolish* (capacity), *wary, patient, hasty, reckless* (tenacity) and for judgements of social sanction *honest, deceptive* (veracity) and *kind, mean* (propriety). The grammatical frame for judgement would be a relational attributive process which ascribes an attitude to some person´s behaviour, for example *It was silly of/for them to do that*. (Martin and White 2005: 59)

 Appreciations are concerned with out reactions to things, their composition and their value. Martin and White (2005: 56) offer illustrative realizations for these as well, for example *arresting, dramatic*, *dry, predictable* (reaction), *proportioned, uneven* (composition) and *priceless, useless* (valuation). Grammatically appreciations are closely related to mental processes, more specifically affection, perception and cognition. (Martin and White 2005: 56-58) A distinguishing frame for appreciation would be a mental process ascribing an attitude to a thing, for example *I consider it beautiful*. (Martin and White 2005: 59) There are also indirect realizations of attitude that are worth exploring (Martin and White 2005: 61-68), but since this study will focus more on engagement, these will not be explored further here.

3.4 Graduation

According to Martin and Rose (2003: 37-43) attitudes are gradable, that is, we can choose whether we want to turn the volume up or tone it down. This is called amplification. They divide amplification into two separate types: force and focus. Force is for turning the volume up or toning it down, whereas focus refers to how we sharpen or soften categories of people and things. Words such as *very*, *really*, and *extremely* amplify the force of attitudes and are known as intensifiers. Another option for amplifying force is attitudinal lexis, words that include a degree of for example happiness or sadness on their own. Metaphors and swearing are also a part of attitudinal lexis. When discussing focus, Martin and Rose (2003: 41-44) state that it is concerned with the resources we have to grade something that is non-gradable, such as things, qualities and numbers. The idea is to sharpen or blur the boundaries between different categories. Martin and White (2005: 137) make the same distinction to force and focus. Focus refers to grading in terms of prototypicality, via locutions such as *true*, *real* and *genuine*. Force refers to grading in terms of intensity or amount, that is, scalar assessments. Martin and White (2005: 135-136) note that graduation is also a feature of the engagement system as well as attitudes, since engagement values vary in their intensity, or the degree of the investment in the proposition. That is, there is a different degree of investment in the sentence depending on the verb one uses. For example *suggest*, *state* or *insist* infer a different degree of investment.

3.5 Engagement

When discussing the third aspect of appraisal, Martin and Rose (2003: 44-54) talk about the source of attitudes, the question of who is doing the evaluating. They use the term 'heterogloss' to refer to attitudes other than the writer's and 'monogloss' to refer to attitudes whose source is the author. When we are reporting what others have said or what they think, we are projecting sources. We can either quote exact words or report a

general meaning of what has been said. By doing this we can add additional sources of evaluation to our texts. Projection can be recursive, talking about what someone said about something, and it can happen not just within sentences, but in texts and text phases. (Martin and Rose 2003: 44-54.) Martin and White (2005: 99) also use the term 'heteroglossic' to refer to locutions which recognise the diverse communicative backdrop of the text. That is, there are dialogistic alternatives in the communicative context that the writer needs to recognise. Not referring to other voices or viewpoints would in turn be categorised as 'monoglossic'. Martin and White (2005: 102) divide heteroglossic resources into two categories: dialogically expansive and dialogically contractive resources. Dialogic expansion refers to actively making space for dialogically alternative positions and voices where as dialogic contraction acts to confront, turn aside or restrain them.

When creating a heteroglossic backdrop for a text, writers need to consider what has been said before, various points of view as well as the possible responses of the reader. Martin and White (2005: 97) include these considerations in the third aspect of appraisal, that is, the category of engagement. Martin and White (2005: 97-98) divide the category of engagement into four sub-categories: disclaim, proclaim, entertain and attribute. Disclaim is used when the textual voice rejects another point of view, either by denying or countering. Proclaim means to represent a proposition so well-founded that it rules out other points of view. This is done by concurrence, pronouncement and endorsement. Proclaim and disclaim refer both to dialogically contractive meanings. By entertain Martin and White refer to the situation where the writer invokes other possible positions by representing the author's proposition as only one of many options. To attribute means to represent a proposition from someone else as one possible alternative. This can be done through acknowledgement and distancing. (Martin and White 2005: 97-98.) Entertain and attribute are dialogically expansive resources. All these subtypes will be further discussed in the following sections.

As suggested, there are two categories of dialogically contractive meanings: disclaim and proclaim. Dialogic contraction refers to meanings which aim to exclude or limit the

number of certain dialogic alternatives in interaction, even though they include other voices and value positions in the dialogistic backdrop of the text. (Martin and White 2005: 117.) Out of these two categories disclaim refers to rejecting some dialogic alternative or presenting it as not applying. (Martin and White 2005: 117). In other words, disclaim refers to those formulations which directly reject or replace some prior utterance or alternative position or consider them unsustainable. (Martin and White 2005: 118).

The category of disclaim is further divided into two subtypes: negation and countering. Dialogically negation means to acknowledge an alternative position by introducing it into the dialogue, in order to reject it. (Martin and White 2005: 118.) In terms of writer-reader relationships, denials are directed either to a third party or to the putative addressee. The writer will either try to express disalignment with a third party, that is, someone other than the reader or writer, or with the assumed beliefs of the putative addressee. (Martin and White 2005: 118-119.) Denials that are directed to the addressee are corrective rather than confrontational, that is, they act to correct misconceptions the writer thinks the addressee has. The assumption in these cases is that the writer is considered to have more expertise than the reader in the particular area discussed in the text. Denials of this kind will enhance solidarity if the reader does not mind being corrected and does not reject the point of view of the writer. Denials directed to a third party, on the other hand, act to convince the reader of the writer's opinion rather than the point of view of the third party. (Martin and White 2005: 120.) Countering, the other sub-type of disclaim, refers to replacing or supplanting the expected proposition by the writer's current proposition. As denials, they present a position which is then replaced with another. (Martin and White 2005: 120.) Countering often works together with denials, with the negation directed to the expectation which the countering aims to replace. (Martin and White 2005: 120). Counters project beliefs and expectations on to the addressee, construing the writer as sharing the reader's point of view and are therefore aligning rather than disaligning and create solidarity. This is obviously not the case if the addressee does not agree with the assumed point of view. (Martin and White 2005: 121.)

Proclaim refers to those formulations which act to narrow down dialogistic alternatives in the text without directly rejecting them. That is, for example presenting a certain idea as far better than any others. (Martin and White 2005: 121). Martin and White (2005: 121-130) divide proclamation into three different subtypes: concurrence, endorsement and pronouncement. First, concurrence refers to formulations which present the writer as agreeing with some dialogic partner, typically the putative addressee. These formulations are dialogistic in that they present the writer as communicating with the readers and contractive in that they expect the reader to share their view. The text includes multiple voices and is therefore heteroglossic, even though it excludes positions other than the one presented by the author. (Martin and White 2005: 122-124.) Second, endorsements are formulations which present external viewpoints as viewpoints that are considered correct or valid by the author. The author takes responsibility for the proposition and makes it subjective, allowing for other opinions. However, as he presents this view as valid, he excludes other opinions and therefore aligns the reader to the same value position. (Martin and White 2005: 126-127.) Third, pronouncements are formulations which indicate a clear authorial emphasis or intervention. These formulations acknowledge other opinions and are therefore heteroglossic and dialogistic but they are contractive as they confront these alternatives through authorial emphasis. (Martin and White 2005: 127-129.) As with denials and counters, the challenge is directed either to the addressee or a third party. If the challenge is against the addressee it requires argumentation from the author in order to maintain solidarity. If the challenge is directed to a third party it creates solidarity as it presents the author as sharing the addressee's view and expresses disalignment with a third party on behalf of the reader. (Martin and White 2005: 129-130.)

As stated earlier, dialogically expansive formulations act to make space for alternative positions in the text. Under dialogically expansive formulations Martin and White (2005: 104-117) discuss the categories of entertaining and attribution. Entertaining refers to dialogically expansive formulations which make space for alternative positions by indicating that the position of the author is only one of the possible positions. (Martin

and White 2005: 104). These entertaining locutions acknowledge the subjectivity of the writer and thereby create a heteroglossic backdrop for the text, as they recognise other positions. (Martin and White 2005: 105). Entertaining allows the writer to commit to a certain viewpoint while at the same time recognising that it may be at odds with other value positions. On the other hand, by entertaining the writer can also express a lack of commitment to a proposition. (Martin and White 2005: 106-107.) By entertaining the writer signals that he/she lacks sufficient knowledge to express anything more than subjective value positions. (Martin and White 2005: 107). Entertaining locutions therefore function to make space for alternative voices and positions in the present context. By doing this, the author recognises a possibly divided audience and creates solidarity by dialogistically validating other viewpoints as well. (Martin and White 2005: 108-109.)

The second type of dialogically expansive formulations, attribution makes space for alternative positions as well, but, as with entertaining, attributes them to an external source rather than the author (Martin and White 2005: 111). Martin and White (2005: 112-114) divide attribution into acknowledgements and distancing. Acknowledgements are external points of view, which are presented as similar to the opinions of the writer. These viewpoints are presented as subjective and therefore make space for alternative positions. Distancing, in contrast, presents external viewpoints into the text but detaches them from the author. As acknowledgements, distancing formulations are grounded in the subjectivity of an external source and hence make space for alternative positions. Distancing formulations can be considered even more dialogically expansive, as they reject any responsibility of the viewpoint presented. (Martin and White 2005: 112-114.) Martin and White (2005: 115) point out that typically in argumentative texts attribution is overtly implicated in terms of alignment and solidarity; the writer announces where they stand with respect to the attributed material.

This study focuses on how writers communicate with their readers, how they present their views, opinions and thoughts, and what kinds of methods they use to persuade their reader. The category of engagement explains the different voices that are present in texts

and how this dialogic background affects the choices writers make. Engagement resources depict how writers can present themselves as agreeing or disagreeing with their reader and describe the options they have in acknowledging other points of views in their texts. The focus of this study is therefore on the category of engagement.

4 PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous studied on appraisal theory and online reviews are discussed in this chapter. There are some studies available on appraisal, many of them focusing on either academic or journalistic texts. Studies on online reviews are often connected to consumer reviews of products and the analysis is done from the point of view of market research and economics. There are some interesting studies on online reviews from the perspective of discourse or textual analysis as well. Though there are studies available on appraisal theory as well as online reviews, there were no studies to be found which included both the appraisal framework as an analytical tool and online reviews of animated television series as the data. This would imply that there is still much room for new studies in the field of appraisal analysis. I will present studies on appraisal in the first section and studies on online reviews in the second section.

4.1 Studies on appraisal

Love (2006: 217) has studied senior secondary school students' online responses to teacher prompts about a postmodernist narrative using the appraisal framework. Love's study aims to find out how the students used these evaluation resources in a curriculum context. Love (2006: 219) notes that online forums provide opportunities for negotiating responses to texts and therefore offer excellent material for studying how meanings are negotiated in texts. Love aims to present the processes involved in negotiating textual responses and which forms of reasoning from literary texts were privileged in the process (Love 2006: 220). Out of the three categories of appraisal, Love focuses on attitude. Love concludes (2006: 237) that appraisal theory can help teachers to identify the extent to which teachers are involved in the kinds of online discussions she studied. She states that appraisal also provides tools for identifying the competencies of the students who are having difficulties in this area (Love 2006: 237). This is an interesting

example of the kinds of options appraisal theory presents to researchers; Love not only depicts the resources used, but uses the appraisal framework to find new methods to be used in teaching. This kind of approach seems relatively popular in appraisal studies.

Allison and Wu (2005: 105-127) have studied evaluative expressions in undergraduate level essays in English language. Their study aims to explore evaluations in different stages of argumentation by comparing evaluation resources from high and low rating essays (Allison and Wu 2005: 106). Allison and Wu (2005: 109) point out that they focus on the resources of engagement system because they were the most commonly used in the essays. Allison and Wu (2005: 109-110) also state that the engagement system allows for the expression of attitudes for a wider audience, as a writer can indicate their opinion as well as recognise and negotiate positions coming from others. They further justify using the appraisal framework by stating that the engagement system notices the responsibility of the writer when attributing propositions to different sources. (Allison and Wu 2005: 111). In their study this is crucial as intertextuality is a feature expected to be found in undergraduate level essays. Allison and Wu's approach is similar to this study in that they also focus on engagement resources, but different in that the aims of their study are different as well as their data.

Allison and Wu (2005: 111) suggest that the appraisal system determines a level on which writers are capable of successfully establishing and negotiating argumentative positions. Furthermore, they state that marking solidarity, evaluating content and acknowledging alternative positions are features of successful academic writing. What Allison and Wu (2005: 124) find is that high-rated essays often maintain a more dialogistically expansive stance where as low-rate essays focus on dialogically contractive expressions. In high-rated essays, the writer uses dialogically expansive resources to soften the level of assertiveness of the claims, uses attributions to create intertextuality and validates their positions through endorsement. Allison and Wu's study has the same type of goals as Love (2006) as they also aim to gain information that

could be useful in learning and teaching. The two studies differ in their data and have chosen different categories of appraisal to focus on.

It seems many studies focus on one aspect of appraisal, or mention appraisal theory as part of the theoretical framework even though the study may not necessarily use the theory as such. When defining evaluation, Hyland (2005: 174) mentions appraisal theory as "perhaps the most systematic approach to these issues". He notes that even though the broad framework is interesting, it remains unclear how the resources mentioned are employed in particular registers and different contexts. This is an important subject to notice, as one can hardly assume that the theory could be used exactly the same way to study academic texts and, in this case, online reviews. Hyland (2005: 175) notes that studies on evaluation and stance have concentrated on mass audience texts, such as media discourse. This is probably due to the rich amount of evaluative examples in them. Interestingly enough, it seems that there are rather few studies available on appraisal that focus on media texts.

Hyland (2005: 173-192) studies the kinds of resources writers use to express positions and to connect with their readers. The study focuses on academic texts, how readers and writers interact in that setting. He also studies how the disciplinary community affects both the readers and the writers. Though Hyland relies on his own approach to stance and engagement, which is slightly different from the one used in this study, he does present another way of looking at reader-writer relationships that allows for comparisons. Hyland (2005: 174) notes that evaluation in academic texts has recently become more popular as a research subject. He studies 240 research articles to investigate how writers in academic settings express a stance and relate to their readers.

Hyland (2005: 175-176) sees evaluation as critical to academic writing, as interaction in academic texts involves adopting a view to an issue as well as other views on that issue. According to Hyland (2005: 176) writers manage these interactions through stance and engagement. Stance refers to the textual voice, the way writers present themselves in the text. Hyland (2005: 176) defines engagement as follows: "This is an alignment

dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognizing the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations. ". While not exactly the same definition of engagement as in Martin and White, Hyland's definition is clearly related to theirs. Also, Hyland's approach is very similar to the goals of this study.

Appraisal theory has also been used in settings not related to academic texts. Lihua (2009: 59-78) has studied patterns of interpersonal rhetoric in editorials using appraisal theory. Lihua has studied attitudinal lexis and modal expressions in order to investigate how evaluation in editorials is communicated. Lihua (2009: 59) claims that the evaluation of events is more likely explicit and the evaluation of behaviour is more likely implicit. Lihua adds that attitudes are seldom attributed to other sources. Lihua (2009: 60) notes that the study is closely related to critical discourse analysis because of the function of editorials to convey value positions of newspapers. Lihua (2009: 63) adopts a view in which evaluation consists of both attitude and modal expressions and uses the appraisal approach to examine attitude in editorials. Lihua (2009: 64) finds that the attitude resources used in the editorials mainly focus on judgement and appreciation. Lihua adds that the fact that the author is the only source in the editorials enhances the authority of the editorial. The interesting point is that this study shares one of the goals of this study: finding out how evaluations are communicated. Lihua's study differs from the present study in that Lihua's study focuses on attitude instead of engagement, the focus is on a different genre and the study relies on other theories as well.

4.2 Studies on online reviews

As regards online film reviews, Bieler et al (2005: 75-78) have conducted a corpus-based study on film reviews from newspapers and websites, focusing on identifying formal zones in the reviews. Unfortunately their study was not available in its entirety and the following notions are based on the abstract of the study. Their study takes a

different theoretical and methodological perspective from this study, since they apply corpus analysis. However, their study offers some interesting points about the genre of reviews, and is also an example of the kind of the studies have been done about online reviews. They consider film reviews as semi-structure; their overall structure is not identical, but there are similarities in the kinds of zones there are as well as their order. By zones Bieler et al (2005: 75) refer to different portions of the text. There are formal zones, such as the title and the name of the reviewer, and functional zones, running text paragraphs which for example inform the reader about the contents of the film. According to Bieler et al (2005: 75) there is no completely conventionalized structure in semi-structured texts but there are rules and tendencies which make the text recognisable as an example of that genre.

In their corpus study of film reviews Bieler et al discovered that often the functionality of the text was evident in the logical structure of the text. They mention the twofold communicative goal of a film review: it acts to inform the reader about the contents of the film and to present a subjective evaluation of it. This kind of definition of review forms a part of the theoretical approach to reviews in this study as well. The set of data used in this study clearly represents a form of the review genre, but is different from other reviews in a number of ways. For example, the reviews have been written by one author only and have been published on a website only. In addition, the reviews that are analysed in this study provide information about the episodes as well as present the evaluations of the writer and one could expect this to be evident in the structure of the reviews as well.

Ivory (2006: 103-114) has studied online reviews of video games in terms of gender representation. In his study Ivory (2009: 103) finds that female characters are underrepresented and more often sexualized than male characters. Ivory (2006: 104) also studies whether online reviews of video games could be used as a source of information about the content of video games. Methodologically Ivory's study is not related to this study and the focus is more on game content than the actual reviews. However, he does

offer some insights into the genre of online review. He sees online reviews as a possible way to study game content, as the authors of the reviews, at least on some sites, are knowledgeable video game players. Furthermore, reviews present the content of a video game as text, which is more easily analysed than the actual game (Ivory 2006: 106). It could be worth exploring whether online reviews on television shows, such as the ones used in this study, could be used to study the contents of television shows.

There are also some studies available that are more clearly related to genre analysis. Taboada (2011: 247-289) studies online movie reviews as a genre from the systematic functional linguistics point of view. She states that from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, genre refers to how any speech activity is organized in stages, which then are defined by social conventions and the purpose of the genre. Taboada (2011: 259) studied the stages through their lexico-grammatical features, that is, the proportion of evaluative words to all other words and, temporal and causal connectives. In her study, Taboada (2011: 264) finds that all of the reviews include an evaluation stage and a description stage. While her study is not related to this study methodologically, it does offer some interesting points concerning the genre of online review. Taboada (2011: 253-257) states that a typical review has five stages: subject matter, plot, evaluation, characters and background. The subject matter stage summarizes the content of the movie and the plot stage summarizes the events chronologically. The characters and background are introduced. Needless to say, the evaluation stage is for evaluating the storyline, the movie as a whole, actors, production and so forth. These five stages could be expected to be present in the online reviews of South Park as well, though a detailed analysis would be needed to say this for sure.

Though Taboada (2011) studies online movie reviews, her corpus is closer to the material used in this study than academic texts. The reviews are written by amateurs and on websites which are devoted to reviews. Taboada (2011: 250) points out that the genre of review is established as printed literary reviews. Printed reviews of films written by professional film critics appeared after films became popular. Recently a somewhat different version of the genre has migrated into the internet. These reviews are usually

written by non-professionals for non-professionals. In terms of the description stage, Taboada (2011: 264) states that they include either a summary of the film, a description of the storyline and characters or information that supports and explains the author's view of the film. This is to some extent true of online reviews explored in this study as well; the reviews include much description of the episodes, though the characters are not thoroughly introduced.

5 THE SET-UP OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The aims of the study as well as the research questions are presented in this chapter. The methodological framework and the data of this study are also presented. I will first present the research problem in the first section and data of this study in section two. In the third section I will briefly go through the methodological framework and the tools of the analysis.

5.1 Aims and research questions

The aim of this study is to investigate and explore the relationships between linguistics forms and their functions in online reviews. In other words, I intend to examine connections between the theory of appraisal and online reviews based on my observations. Online reviews have been studied from various perspectives, for example online product reviews have been studied for market research purposes. However, there are few studies available on online reviews as a genre and even fewer, if any, studies available on online reviews of animated television series. There is certainly room for new studies in this field. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to present another perspective on analysing online reviews.

 The aim of my work is to study the way lexical and grammatical tools are used in reviews to express opinions. According to the theory of appraisal, writers can express attitude through several grammatical structures and writers can align themselves with their audience and present their value positions through graduation and engagement. The appraisal framework offers different options for doing this. The focus of this study is on the category of engagement; how writers communicate with their readers and how they address them while expressing their own points of view. Therefore the main research

question of my thesis would be: Which of the options of engagement are used in online reviews and what purpose do they serve? Following the categories of engagement this main question can be divided into four more specific questions:

1. Are the denials and counters directed to the reader or at a third party? Do they enhance solidarity and if so, in what ways?

2. Proclaiming locutions forward challenges to either the reader or a third party. Are the challenges in the reviews directed to the readers or a third party? Do they enhance solidarity and if so, in what ways?

3. Entertaining locutions make space for alternative positions in the text and therefore enhance solidarity. What kinds of entertaining locutions were there in the texts and how did they enhance solidarity?

4. Attributions make space for alternative positions in the texts and enhance solidarity as the writer states where they stand with respect to the attributed material. What kinds of attributions were present in the text?

My initial hypothesis is that the online environment has an effect on how the writer uses engagement resources; the writer's choices may be more cautious than in traditional reviews because of the social nature of online communities. The overall online setting of the reviews forms a part of the research problem: Do the reviews connect to their readers in a way that is characteristic to online reviews only? One of the aims of this study is to explore and present these kinds of characteristics.

5.2 General description of the data: *South Park* reviews on IGN

According to their website (About-IGN Entertainment) IGN Entertainment is "a leading online media & services company obsessed with gaming, entertainment and everything guys enjoy". IGN was founded in 1996 and today maintains a global presence in the

United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Germany. IGN Entertainment's media properties include IGN and other sites such as AskMen and RottenTomatoes. IGN is a division of News Corporation, a part of Digital Media Group and Fox Interactive Media (News Corporation) which according to their website is "an interactive services company dedicated to connecting, informing, entertaining and empowering consumers with the most compelling online media experiences". In addition to IGN, AskMen and RottenTomatoes, their web properties include MySpace, Photobucket and Fox Sports Interactive.

IGN is an English-language website that offers information about games, films, television, cheats, codes and game guides as well as previews and reviews. The website has over seventy reviews on South Park episodes written by IGN staff members and also offers, for example, information about the show itself, season reviews and fan reviews. The reason to choose these reviews is that they are well written and interesting and therefore offer useful material for my study. The problem with this material is of course that they only represent one particular website, that is, this study does not allow for generalizations about the genre of online reviews as a whole. However, it does offer some insights to a genre which has not been studied before and possibilities to compare the results with previous studies on more traditional types of reviews.

IGN Entertainment is intended for men ages 18-34 online, providing information about games, entertainment and men's lifestyle (IGN Entertainment). The fact that the website is primarily intended for an audience I myself am not a member of may present a problem to my analysis even though as a fan of the show I am in a way part of the target audience. On the other hand, as an outsider I may be able to notice characteristics that are not that evident to the intended audience or perhaps distinct to reviews intended only for a male audience.

For this study I collected reviews on episodes from the seasons 12 and 13 of the show *South Park*, knowing that I would most likely have to restrict my analysis on either one

of these seasons. I decided on seasons 12 and 13 because they are still relatively new seasons and include different kinds of episodes as opposed to older seasons. I considered comparing these reviews to reviews of older episodes, but the older episodes have not been reviewed as systematically as the new ones and reviews of them are harder to find. After going through the materials I decided on season 12. The reviews of season 12 have received on average better reviews and the reviews of season 12 also vary more in the grade that they have been given. The type of analysis this study presents, qualitative analysis, requires detailed linguistic analysis of these texts and therefore reviews on only one of these seasons will provide enough material for this study. Furthermore, I considered whether to analyze the reviews as a group or to perhaps focus on certain ones, for example positive or negative reviews, in the end deciding on treating the reviews of season 12 as one collection of texts.

As a whole, the data consists of fourteen reviews of episodes from the 12th season of the animated television series *South Park*. The reviews were published one day after the episode's original air date on television; the first seven reviews in March-April 2008 and the last seven in October-November 2008. In terms of general format the reviews are quite similar. The reviews are on average about 1-2 pages long or around 500-600 words. The headings of the reviews follow the same formula, including the name of the show and the name of the episode, for example *South Park: "Tonsil Trouble" Review.* The main heading is followed by a subheading which already includes some evaluation and hints of the storyline of the episode concerned, for example *Cartman is here to tell you that AIDS still sucks.* All of the reviews include a photo from the episode being evaluated roughly in the middle of the review; except for the review of episode four which has two photos. All of the reviews have been written by the same author, Travis Fickett. There is a link to the reviewer on the review page, the page behind simply defines the author as a dude from the US. The fact that all the reviews have been written by the same author brings certain continuity to the reviews. The downside of this is that characteristics that stand out from the text can be characteristic to the writer rather than being characteristic to the text genre.

The episodes have been rated on a scale from 0.0 to 10.0; 0.0 being "The absolute worst of the worst." and 10.0 "Virtually flawless." These ratings have been determined by the IGN Network and the writer is expected to follow these guidelines in their reviews. (IGN TV Ratings 2011) Out of the fourteen reviews, two had a rating from 9.0 to 9.9 which according to the website accounts for "A fantastic achievement with only minor flaws or imperfections. If a show scores a 9.0 or better you know it's a must-watch for anyone who enjoys good TV. ". Four episodes had a rating from 8.0 to 8.9. This grading is depicted as "An excellent television experience that misses the boat in just a few key areas. TV shows that score in this range still come highly recommended by IGN." Six episodes had a rating from 7.0 to 7.9 , a rating described as "An enjoyable TV show that has some obvious flaws." Shows scoring in the high end of this range are described as maybe having some first-rate elements, whereas those in the lower 7 end have some serious shortcomings keeping them from achieving classic status. Two episodes had a rating from 6.0 to 6.9, which is described as "Passable, but just barely. TV shows in this range have more blemishes than strengths, but still might be worth a look if you're into the show's genre." (IGN TV Ratings 2011.) The rating of the episode is found at the end of each review. All in all the episodes have been given quite positive reviews, except for the two episodes which had a rating from 6.0 to 6.9. The grades could of course be a sign of the writer being a fan himself who assumes he is writing for other fans.

5.3 Methods of analysis: examining engagement

As suggested above, engagement is about how writers position themselves in relation to other opinions and their readers. As attitude and graduation, engagement is realized through grammatical structures. Engagement is divided into four types of meaning; disclaim, proclaim, entertain and attribute, which then are further divided into subcategories – the following examples are based on Martin and White (2005).

When analyzing disclaim, specifically the subcategory of deny, one has to look for negations and denials such as *no*, *didn't* and *never*. The other subtype, countering, is

typically realized through conjunctions and connectives such as *although*, *however, yet* and *but*. Countering is also realized through comment adjuncts/adverbials, for example *surprisingly* and also through adjuncts such as *even, only, just* and *still.* (Martin and White 2005: 118-122.)

Proclaim is divided into three categories; concur, pronounce and endorse. Concurrence is realized through locutions such as *of course*, *naturally*, *not surprisingly*, *admittedly* and *certainly*. Sometimes concurrence is realized through rhetorical or leading questions, that is, questions that need no answer or to which the answer is obvious. (Martin and White 2005: 122-123.) Pronouncement is realized through locutions such as *I contend…* , *The facts of the matter are that…* , *The truth of the matter is that…* , *We can only conclude that…* , and also through intensifiers such as *really, indeed* and so forth. (Martin and White 2005: 127). Endorsement is realized via verbs such as *show*, *prove*, *demonstrate*, *find* and *point* which infer that the source is considered correct by the writer. (Martin and White 2005: 126).

The category of entertain can be identified by the use of modals of probability, reality phases and certain types of interpersonal metaphor. Writers entertain through modal auxiliaries, for example *may, might, could, must* etc, modal adjuncts, for example *perhaps, probably, definitely* etc, modal attributes such as *it's possible that, it's likely that,* through circumstances, for example *in my view* and through certain mental verb/attribute projections such as *I suspect that, I think, I believe, I'm convinced that, I doubt*. One also needs to pay attention to evidence/appearance-based postulations such as *it seems, it appears, apparently, the research suggests* and rhetorical or expository questions that "don't assume a specific response but are employed to raise the possibility that some proposition holds". Locutions concerned with permission and obligation, so called deontic modality is part of the category of entertain, for example *You must turn off the lights when you leave*. (Martin and White 2005: 104-111.)

When analyzing attribution, one needs to look for communicative process verbs such as *say* or verbs that refer to mental processes, such as *believe* and *suspect*. Also, nominalizations of these processes and adverbial adjuncts such as *according to* and *in X's view* can be used in attribution. Attribution can also be realized by not specifying a source, through formulations such as *it is said that. R*eporting verbs such as *say, report, state, declare, announce, believe* and *think* are crucial when analyzing the subcategory of acknowledge. The other subcategory, distancing, is realized through the reporting verb *to claim* and by the use of scare quotes. (Martin and White 2005: 111-113.)

The analysis was performed by systematically going through the different categories; the reviews were printed and the examples of different categories were highlighted in the texts. These findings were listed on tables which were divided according to the categories of engagement. The tables were meant to give an overall picture of the examples and to give ease to the analysis. The tables were carefully studied to discover which of the engagement categories were the most popular. The use of different categories was then analysed and the most depictive examples were chosen from the texts. Furthermore, other textual characteristics that occurred frequently or drew attention were listed on a different table and then analysed.

6 RESULTS

In this chapter I will present the results of the appraisal analysis. The focus of the study is on how writers communicate with their readers within texts and how writers take their audience into consideration. In the following sections from 6.1 to 6.4, I will present the results from each category of engagement in their own sections, starting from the category of disclaim and then moving to the categories of entertain, proclaim and attribute. In the last section 6.5 I will present other findings found from the reviews, which were not clearly related to the appraisal theory, but which were very prominent in the texts and clearly connected to the genre of online review.

6.1 Disclaim

The category of disclaim is divided into two sub-categories: deny and counter. The main research question concerning the category of disclaim is whether the denials and counters are directed to the reader or at a third party and whether they enhance solidarity and if so, in what ways. The results from these categories will be presented in the following sections.

6.1. 1 Denials

Negations and denials were a common feature in the reviews as they could be found in each of the reviews. An important aspect of analysing this category was that one needed to pay a lot of attention to whether the negation or denial functioned in the way assumed in the theory of appraisal. I started by looking at whether the denials introduced a positive or a negative evaluation of the episode. The denials and negations could be assigned into five different kinds of groups; denials which inferred a positive evaluation,

denials which inferred a negative evaluation, denials which inferred a positive or negative evaluation of the episode in relation to previous episodes, denials which inferred a negative evaluation even though they pointed out some positive feature in the episode and denials which inferred a positive evaluation of the episode even though they pointed out some negative feature in the episode. In the end, what seemed a great amount of examples could be narrowed down extensively since not nearly all of the denials met the qualifications of denials in the "engagement" sense. In other words, many of the examples turned out to be more related to the description of the storyline. The analysis aimed to find out whether the denials were directed at a third party or against the putative reader. Furthermore, the analysis aimed to find out, whether the denials were attempting to convince the reader of a certain point of view or attempting to correct their point of view which the author assumed they would have and if this was connected to whether the evaluation was positive or negative.

There were denials found in the reviews which inferred a straightforward positive evaluation of the episode, though they were not a common feature. They seemed to be more related to the creators of the show than the actual episode, as the writer evaluated the episode through evaluations of the creators' performance. In example 1, the denial indicates disalignment with a third party. It is not stated specifically who the third party is. Also, in this example the writer sees the reader as someone who needs convincing and who may share this view of the third party. This is then supported by a positive evaluation of Trey Parker's effort in the episode.

> **Example 1 Not** enough is said about the voice talents of Trey Parker and Matt Stone. Parker shines here as Cartman. (review 9)

In example 2 the writer again directs the denial towards a third party, in this case people who have claimed that the creators of *South Park* are out of ideas. Again, the reader is seen as someone who might be tempted to think that the third party might be correct.

> **Example 2** Something to take away from this episode is the fact that Matt and Trey certainly **are not** out of ideas. (review 7)

Some of the denials inferred a straightforward negative evaluation of the episode. In example 3 the denial is directed a third party who would claim that the episode did indeed work. This is different from the previous examples in that the denial is personal and the overall evaluation is on the negative side, but it still makes the assumption that the reader might be susceptible to the "wrong" kind of opinion. The denial is supported by the evaluations that follow it.

> **Example 3** It just **didn't work** for me, with a lot of the jokes feeling flat and the premise being just plain goofy. (review 11)

In example 4 the denial is again correcting the reader. The reader might be susceptible to think that the ideas presented in the episode were correct. Here the author denies the information given in the episode and supports his negative evaluation of the episode by pointing out flaws in the storyline. This is further supported in the text.

> **Example 4** That**'s not** theoretical money- that's very real money. And this is when the internet "hasn't matured as a distribution mechanism." The question **wasn't** whether or **not** the stakes were legitimate, it was simply a matter of whether to fight nor or later. (review 4)

There were denials in the reviews which inferred a positive or negative evaluation of the episode in relation to previous episodes. In example 5 the denial is directed at the reader:

> **Example 5** Oh, and Randy suddenly has taken up videotaping the family. Why? So that the show can do a *Cloverfield* parody sequence. Remember *Cloverfield*? Yeah, it was a while ago. **Not** exactly the sudden turnaround that *South Park* is known for. (review 10).

South Park is known for absurd and outrageous plot twists. The author wants to make sure that the reader knows what *South Park* is known for and attempts to correct any possible misunderstandings. In a way he also creates solidarity among those readers who share his view; they all know that this is not what the show is known for. On the other hand, readers who do not share this view are excluded.

There was a denial in review 3 which was connected to the last two episodes, or rather, negative evaluations of them. This denial is presented in example 6:

Example 6 All in all, this is a terrific episode – funny throughout - and **not** just because the last two pretty much sucked. (review 3)

This denial is interesting as the denial could theoretically be directed at a third party or the reader. Both a third party and the reader might feel that this episode was good only because of the past two episodes. This of course depends on how the author sees the reader, as someone who does not share his expertise or someone who is very much involved in the show and shares his expertise. This would create solidarity among those readers who share his expertise as this suggests that they all know what he refers to by this and the denial is directed to a third party. In the case of a more inexperienced reader, this denial attempts to make sure the reader knows that there is more to this episode; to compare it to the previous episodes only would be a mistake.

There were denials found in the reviews which inferred an overall negative evaluation, even though the sentence may have included a positive feature in the review as well. Many of the evaluations were connected to a distinction between amusing and hilarious, where hilarious was the basic expectation from the show. In example 7 the writer rejects the idea that amusing would be good enough, and directs the denial to the reader. This creates solidarity among those readers who also expect the show to be more than amusing:

Example 7 This is all amusing- it's just **not** very funny. (review 6)

On the other hand, there were denials found in the reviews which inferred an overall positive evaluation of the episode, while the sentence referred to some negative feature in the episode. These two denials presented in example 8 from review 11 are closely related, rejecting the expectation of the episode being a landmark episode or covering anything new and then followed by a positive evaluation. This denial is directed at the reader, making sure that the he or she is aware this is not an exceptional episode just on

the grounds of being funny:

> **Example 8** This **isn't** a landmark episode. It's **not** covering any social or political ground in terms of satire. It's just a fun, funny episode filled with outright nonsense, good jokes, good use of the established *South Park* characters – and Guinea Pigs in funny outfits. (review 11)

There were also some denials found in the reviews which were more related to the description of the storyline than evaluation. In review three for instance there were some borderline cases where instead of being denials in the disclaim sense the denials could have been just description of the storyline, as in example 9:

> **Example 9** We open in school, Mr. Mackey is giving out information he **shouldn't** be. (review 3)

To sum up, the denials in the reviews could be directed to either the reader or to a third party. There was a clear effort from the writer to enhance solidarity with his audience by taking points of view other than his own into consideration as well.

6.1.2 Counters

Counters were also a common feature in the reviews. Especially conjunctions and connectives such as *but*, *however* and *while* were used frequently. Examples of the use of *though*, *yet*, *although* and *rather than* could also be found. There were also comment adjuncts and adverbials in the reviews such as *unfortunately* and *ultimately*.

There were also adjuncts such as *still* in the reviews. The counters found in the reviews can be roughly assigned to four different groups. There were counters which acknowledged a negative feature in the text but ended up in a positive evaluation of the episode as well as counters which ended up in a negative evaluation despite a positive feature in the episode. Also, there were counters which were related to previous episodes and the ones that clearly inferred either a positive or a negative evaluation of the episode. As a whole, counters inferred that different elements in the episodes could be

evaluated in several different ways; sometimes it seems the writer is not certain of his point of view while sometimes he openly challenges others' opinions. In terms of engagement, the most important aspect was to explore whether the writer uses counters to project beliefs and expectations on to the addressee and to construe the writer as sharing the reader's point of view.

 A number of the counters acknowledged a negative feature about the episode but still ended in a positive evaluation of the episode as a whole, as in example 10:

> **Example 10** Mr. Queermo's "slapping" gets overdone a bit in the episode, **but** it's pretty damn funny. Especially when he somehow manages to instantaneously cross his yard to slap his neighbour. You could kind of see it coming that someone would figure out that throwing a punch would put him in his place, **but** it's still funny when it happens. (review 13)

In this example, the writer acknowledges that the episode goes a bit too far with a joke and is in a way too predictable, but then replaces the criticism by pointing out that even the overdone and somewhat predictable the episode is in fact, funny. By stating what exactly is wrong with the episode he disaligns himself from a third party, who is assumed to think that the predictability of the episode somehow makes it less funny. At the same time the counter aligns the writer with the reader, who is expected to share this view. This of course creates solidarity among the readers only if they too thought the episode was funny despite some flaws.

 Some of the counters acknowledged a positive feature about the episode but ended in a negative overall evaluation of the episode. *South Park* started out from rude language and toilet humor, but social commentary has become part of the show and today many fans expect the episodes to comment on social issues. In example 11 the writer aligns himself with a reader who is expected to share his view that the show should focus on being funny rather than social commentary:

> **Example 11** There's some social commentary in here, and it's about time someone chastised the media for their role in the disaster that has become Britney Spears's life – **but** the problem is that most of that commentary comes without the funny. (review 2)

Here the writer projects onto the reader a belief that the show should not attempt social criticism if it is not capable of doing it in a funny way. Solidarity is at risk if the reader thinks the commentary was funny or feels that social commentary is more important than whether the jokes work or not.

Some of the counters more clearly inferred either a positive or a negative evaluation of the episode. In review 4 the writer uses a counter to emphasize his negative evaluation of the episode. This is presented in example 12:

> **Example 12** The musical number is only vaguely amusing, and **although** they try and get some mileage out of the fact that nobody knows what Canada being on strike means – that sort of undermines their effort to parallel the Hollywood writers strike. In that case – everyone knew exactly what that meant: that no writers were writing. (review 4)

In example 12 the writer aligns himself with a putative reader who is expected to share the writer's negative view on the episode. The writer refers to the creators of the show by using *they,* as he has already referred to them by their names earlier in the review. The counter projects a belief that the creators of the show had not succeeded in their effort to parallel Canada and the Hollywood writers' strike even though they get a relatively funny joke out of it. He brings up a positive feature about the storyline only to point out that it actually does not serve its purpose and instead works against it.

 One significant group were the counters which were related to previous episodes and the expectation that amusing is not enough and the show is expected to be hilarious, as in example 13:

> **Example 13** Here **however**, the show falls back on its old gimmicks of a national crisis with fast-paced scenes of man talking importantly about stupid things. The show is good at this stuff, **but** we've seen it all before and it seems out of place and meaningless here. It's a long walk for a joke that's only somewhat amusing, and never hilarious. (review 10)

In example 13, the putative addressee is someone who has been watching the show for a relatively long time. The writer aligns himself with a reader who not only expected to

know enough about the show to know about its "old gimmicks", but also expected to consider himself as part of the "we" the writer talks about. Solidarity is at risk if the reader is someone who has not been watching the show for a longer time. The belief projected onto the readers is that the show should be able to produce new jokes and not rely on old ones.

All in all, the counters found in the reviews were similar to the denials in that they were directed to both the readers as well as third parties. The writer does seem to make an effort to enhance solidarity, but seems more willing to take risks while using counters than with denials.

6.2 Entertain

Entertainment refers to the writer projecting an audience divided over an issue and which may not share his view. The underlining purpose of entertaining is therefore to create solidarity even among those readers who do not share the author's view. Entertaining locutions make space for alternative positions in the text and therefore enhance solidarity. The main research question with regard to the category of entertain is what kinds of entertaining locutions there are in the texts and how they enhance solidarity. The results of the analysis of the category of entertain will be presented in the following sections.

 As the category could be conveyed through several types of meanings, the results are presented with the help of these groupings. By far the most popular way of entertaining other points of view was through evidence/appearance-based postulations. Modal auxiliaries and modal adjuncts were also a common feature in the texts. Modal attributes on the other hand were not used often. A number of mental verb/attribute projections could also be found in the texts. There were several rhetorical or expository questions in the reviews, but they were more related to the category of proclaim. Entertaining

through circumstances such as *in my view* and locutions concerned with permission and obligation were not used in the reviews.

6.2.1 Evidence-appearance-based postulations

Evidence and appearance-based postulations were among the more popular ways on entertaining. There were several appearance-based postulations which inferred a clear negative evaluation, where the writer indicated that the evaluation was based on observations and indicated that the view might not have been shared by others. Many of the evidence and appearance-based postulation were connected to the creators of the show, as in example 14:

> **Example 14** Once again, Parker and Stone **seem** to be pulling a DVD at random and lampooning a movie that – while somewhat obscure(at this point) – has a place in the cultural landscape. (review 5)

In this example the writer is cautious as to accusing the creators of the show of anything, possibly because they are real people instead of an episode of a television series. While he criticizes the show and the creators, he acknowledges those who do not share his view. In example 15 the writer is not cautious because of criticizing real people, but because he aims to create solidarity among those readers who do not share his view:

> **Example 15** Too bad everything else **seems** to miss the mark. (review10)

This kind of evidence and appearance-based postulations as displayed in example 15 were typical in the reviews. The writer presents his evaluations and opinions, but instead of stating them as the only correct ones takes into consideration those readers who may feel differently.

6.2.2 Modal auxiliaries

Modal auxiliaries were a common feature in the reviews and were used in connection with different themes. In some cases modal auxiliaries were used because of a touchy subject as in example16:

> **Example 16** While the portrayal of "Mr. Cartmanez" **might** be an offensive ethnic stereotype (what do you expect, it's Cartman) – that **might not** be as offensive to some as the dressing down of Bill Belichik and the New England Patriots. While attacking the Patriots at this point **might seem** like piling on since their embarrassing Super Bowl defeat, *South Park* takes Belichick to task for not just cheating, but getting away with it. After having their historic winning streak ended, Patriots fans **may not** take kindly to Mr. Cartmanez pointing out that when the Patriots wanted to "win this one for real" they lost. It's "the white people method." (review 5)

In example 16 the writer indicates that these are only some of the possible positions by using the modal auxiliary *might*. Furthermore, in the end the writer emphasises the possibility of other positions by using *seem* and indicating that this is only an observation. What is interesting to note is that these resources of entertain work together with resources from the category of disclaim (while) and proclaim (rhetorical question).

There were also cases where modal auxiliaries were used simply to acknowledge that readers may feel differently, as in example 17:

> **Example 17** Now, having recently criticized the show for making references to a sixty year old short story, **it would seem** that a 27 year old movie is only slightly more relevant. While this **might** be true, the scenes based on Heavy Metal are a whole lot funnier. (review 3)

In example 17 the writer emphasizes his own opinion and seems to clearly favor them over other possible positions, even though he basically acknowledges them as just as valid. The use of modal auxiliaries would appear to convey more insecurity from the writer than for example appearance-based postulations.

6.2.3 Modal adjuncts

Modal adjuncts were also commonly used in the reviews; the most common was by far *probably*. An example of this is presented in example 18:

> **Example 18** Matt and Trey have **probably** figured out exactly what the appeal of High School Musical was: Zack Efron. If Zack Efron had spent two hours swinging through trees with monkeys...it **probably** would have worked about as well. (review 13)

In example 18 the writer indicates that these are guesses, he's not sure, he may be wrong, some may disagree and leaves room for other possible positions. The fact that he repeats the importance of Zack Efron would still indicate that he is clearly behind this view. There were also instances as the one presented in example 19, where the modal adjuncts were more clearly because the writer was simply making guesses:

> **Example 19** "The Ungroundable" launches off the latest vampire fad, born mostly out of the "Twilight" series of novels and coming movie, and **perhaps** the popularity of True Blood as a book and TV series as well. (review 14)

In example 19 the writer indicates that this is his guess, he is not sure whether *True Blood* had and affect or not. On the other hand, the use of modal adjuncts in example 20 infers a somewhat surer opinion:

> **Example 20** Part of the fun is watching how they **apparently** couldn't show a close-up of a penis, so it's either in soft focus or in the distance as it flops around while the mouse runs about. (review 5)

Compared to modal auxiliaries, modal adjuncts seem to infer more certain evaluations. Furthermore, modal adjuncts are more clearly varied in their intensity. This indicates that the writer uses different kinds of resources to infer different levels of insecurity or security. This is more connected to the category of graduation and will not be further discussed here, though it offers interesting possibilities for further studies.

6.2.4 Modal attributes and mental/verb attribute projections

Mental attribute projections were also used in the reviews. Needless to say, because of their form mental/verb attribute projections clearly indicated that the writer was presenting his own view, as in example 21:

> **Example 21** This is classic Cartman, and **I don't think** Parker gets enough credit for being able to do that horribly grating voice and then... (review 9)

In example 21 the writer indicates that this is his view and it might not be shared by others, combined with a denial, clearly committing to this view, criticising perhaps the audience or other reviewers, challenging others' opinions even though it is not stated who these others are. Another interesting example was in review 6, presented here in example 22, where the writer clearly is against a certain point of view:

> **Example 22** I've been watching the series from the first episode, and though **I think** the show is markedly different from its early days – **I don't believe** it degraded in quality as it expanded its repertoire of characters and the diversity of its stories. (review 6)

While the writer clearly indicates an opposing opinion, he also indicates that these are his views and others may feel differently. It is worth noting that he establishes his credentials among the readers by stating he has been watching the show from the very beginning.

There was one modal attribute in review 6 which was the only modal attribute to be found in all of the reviews, displayed here in example 23:

> **Example 23** In our Idiot Box feature last week, I said **it was possible** that this season could run mediocre through its entirety – and we could still have a good season 13. Right now, it looks like next season can't come soon enough. (review 6)

It is accompanied by modal auxiliaries and an appearance-based postulation. This

indicates that this is what the author thought, not necessarily others. At the beginning he makes a commitment to the position, but towards the end makes it clear that he is guessing, based on observations.

6.3 Proclaim

The underlying notion behind the category of proclaim is that proclaiming locutions forward challenges to either the reader or a third party. The main research question concerning this category is whether the challenges in the reviews are directed to the readers or a third party. Also, do the proclaiming locutions enhance solidarity and if so, in what ways? The results of the analysis will be presented in the following sections.

6.3.1 Concurrence

The category of concurrence was the most common out of the subcategories of proclaim. The main issue surrounding concurrence is what kinds of values or beliefs the writer presents as universally held or valid. Concurrence was conveyed in the reviews through locutions such as *of course* and *certainly* as well as through rhetorical or leading questions. Leading questions could occur on their own as in example 24:

> **Example 24** First off, if you hadn't seen any promotional material, were you expecting Cartman to find out he was given AIDS? (review 1)

Here the universally held belief would be that no one was expecting Cartman to find out he was given AIDS. The writer creates a reader who is expected to share this view and who was just as surprised as he was about the storyline. Sometimes leading or rhetorical questions could be situated in the middle of the sentence, adding an informal and conversational feel to the review, as in example 25:

> **Example 25** It's not one of the series' all time best, but if anyone was worried the series was getting stale(**and after the last two, who'd blame you?**) - those fears can now be laid to rest. (review 3)

In example 25 the belief is that the last two episodes were not good ones and deserved criticism. The author assumes the reader has seen the last two episodes and shared the writer's negative evaluation. Another interesting feature is the turn from anyone to you, where the author clearly addresses the reader. When concurrence was conveyed through locutions such as of course, the statement seemed much less conversational, as in example 26:

> **Example 26 Of course**, all of this leads to parental paranoia that leads to parental hysteria. (review 3)

Here the writer makes it obvious that this is the only possible result of the storyline. It relies on the expectation that the reader has been watching the show long enough to know that the parents' hysteria and overreacting is a common feature in the show. A reader not familiar with the show would be left wondering the point of this remark.

Sometimes the locutions formed a concede-counter-pair, as in example 27:

> **Example 27** While there is **certainly** some sudden and shocking violence(by cartoon standards anyway) in this episode, it serves the plot and is never employed as a joke unto itself. (review 7)

Here the writer is trying to win the reader over, acknowledging the violence as he assumes the readers have paid attention to this. There were several concede-counter-pairs found in the reviews which offer room for more research but which for reasons of space will not be further explored here.

6.3.2 Endorsement

The results from the category of endorsement were few. Endorsement concerns locutions which align the reader into the value position of the author. In example 28 the author

presents the character of Randy Marsh as one of the funniest characters:

> **Example 28** One of the best reasons for expanding the character base has been Randy Marsh. Stan's dad **has proven to be** one of the show's funniest characters, and a number of classic episodes have had <u>him at their center</u>. (review 6)

Here there is clear statement which presents the author's subjective view. The statement is then followed by *has proven to be* which emphasizes the validity of the statement. The validity of the statement is further supported by the link to episodes that have had the character Randy at their center.

6.3.3 Pronouncement

The category of pronouncement was not among the popular categories but there were a few instances in the reviews where pronouncement was used. Even though Martin and White (2005:127) does not list *in fact* or *again* among the examples of intensifiers with clausal scope, they have been treated as such in the present study, as they in my view function much in the same way as *really* and *indeed*, which were listed by Martin and White. The main issue concerning pronouncement was whether the writer used an authorial intervention challenge the value position of the reader or a third party. In example 29 the challenge is directed to the reader:

> **Example 29** What makes this even funnier is if you check out the original movie, you'll realize that it's only slightly less ridiculous. **In fact**, South Park is wholesale ripping off certain shots and compositions without tweaking them much at all. (review 3)

Here the authorial intervention seems to support the previous statement, or rather, the previous statement supports the authorial intervention in order to maintain solidarity with the reader. In example 30, however, the challenge is directed to a third party:

> **Example 30** Half-Head Brit dies and South Park has a great harvest. An entertainment news piece talks about Miley Cyrus, and the towns folk see their next victim. **Again**, the point is made – but the jokes are not. (review 2)

Here the authorial intervention builds solidarity as it acts to present disalignment on behalf of the reader, insisting upon the value/warrantability of the of the proposition. The writer emphasizes the importance of the episode being funny; the fact that the show gets its point across is irrelevant if it is not funny at the same time.

An interesting finding in the category of proclaim was in fact that the category was not among the popular ones. Leading and rhetorical questions were quite common; they create a certain audience for the reviews as well as engage the audience into the text by directly addressing them.

6.4 Attribute

The category of attribution is divided into acknowledgement and distancing. Attributions act to create solidarity through making space for alternative opinions. As attributions make space for alternative positions in the texts and enhance solidarity as the writer states where they stand with respect to the attributed material, the main research question with regard to this category is what kinds of attributions are present in the text. The results from these categories are presented in the following sections.

6.4.1 Acknowledge

There were only a couple of acknowledgements in the reviews. In example 31, when discussing episode 4 and the faults in the storyline, the writer refers to a real life person to support his statements:

> **Example 31** In fact, Beth Comstock, the President of Integrated Media for NBC Universal **told** investors that her company expected digital revenue to reach one billion dollars in 2008. (review 4)

The quote supports his earlier statements in the review about how the creators of the show had incorrect statements in the show about how to make money on the internet.

This is the only example in all of the reviews where the writer uses an external source to support his statements. In example 31 it is made clear who this value position is coming from, where as in example 32 the value position is not credited to a specific person:

> **Example 32** There are **those who believe** that any show – no matter how good – begins to suck after its first couple of seasons. (review 6)

In example 32 the value position is attributed to an external source and the writer detaches himself from this opinion by using the words *those who*. In example 33 the opinion is attributed to a source which is somewhat more distinct:

> **Example 33** This holds true for South Park, where **certain disgruntled fans have been complaining** for years that the show lost its way once episodes moved out of the school and took the focus off of the boys(note how these same grumbling fans continue to watch anyway...). (review 6)

Again the writer detaches himself from the value position. One of the interesting points about this example is that the writer does acknowledge other opinions, but clearly infers that the reader is assumed to share his view with the comment in the end.

6.4.2 Distance

The category of distancing was the more popular one of the attribution categories. Especially scare quotes were used often, sometimes ironically as in example 34:

> **Example 34** The song "AIDS Burger in Paradise" is probably only funny if you have been subjected to Buffet's **"music"** at some point in your life. (review 1)

In example 34 the author addresses both readers who know who Jimmy Buffet is as well as readers who do not. Readers who know about the artist are expected to share the author's view and get a good laugh out of the ironic reference. Readers who are familiar with the artist, on the other hand, get a sense of the writer's opinion because of the scare quotes. There were also instances where the author seemed to want to detach himself

from a term, as in example 35:

> **Example 35** It's also nice to see that, although this is another **"issue"** episode, it's still quite funny and places the emphasis on comedy as opposed to making a drawn out argument(like the Britney episode). (review 4)

Possibly someone else came up with the term *issue episode* and the author prefers not to use the term without some indication that the term originated from someone else. There were also instances where the author used scare quotes because of the accuracy of a term, presented here in example 36:

> **Example 36** "Super Fun Time" once again feels like **"classic South Park"**, if there is such a thing. (review 7)

In example 36 the author is reluctant to define "classic South Park", possibly because it might disalign him from readers who have a different understanding of what is meant by *classic South Park*. He had also criticized the term in the previous review so it would make sense to avoid using the term, since many of his readers might have read the previous review.

As with the category of proclaim, the resources of attribution were not among the popular ones. One finding was that scare quotes were used relatively often and in different ways. All in all the findings in the category of engagement would suggest a strong emphasis on creating, enhancing and sustaining solidarity between the writer and the reader. Also, the resources of engagement seem to be used in order to create an expectation of a certain kind of audience.

6.5 Other findings

There were several interesting features in the texts which were not related to the appraisal framework, but which were relevant in terms of characteristics of online reviews. The reviews are rather structured as they for example all include description of

the episode, a picture from the episode, a grade at the end of the review and so forth. The style of the reviews is quite informal and conversational. It seems characteristic to the reviews to include many references to for example popular films, television series and musicians. The writer uses different ways to refer to them and the references also serve different kinds of purposes. The study attempts to discover the connections between these characteristics and their function in relation to their audience. Furthermore, the analysis attempts to describe the relationship between the writer and his readers. These findings are presented in the following sections.

6.5.1 Links to the show and the IGN website

There was a link to the show in every one of the reviews, as in example 37:

> **Example 37** "<u>Britney's New Look</u>" feels like someone attempting to do <u>South Park</u>, and failing. (review 2)

The links lead to short descriptions of the episode and of the series on the IGN website. These web pages then include more links to the IGN website. These links act to give information about the episodes as well as the show. Also, they encourage the reader to explore the IGN site further. Some reviews had links to previous episodes as well. Note the peculiar kind of link in example 38. Instead of listing certain episodes here, the author just gives the reader a possibility to see a list of episodes that have had Randy at their centre:

> **Example 38** Stan's dad has proven to be one of the show's funniest characters, and a number of episodes have had <u>him at their center</u>.(review 6)

The link takes the reader to an article on the IGN website that has been written by the same author as the review. In example 39 the writer refers to previous episodes by their

name and offers links to the reader to find out more:

> **Example 39** I was pretty down on the first part of ˝"Pandemic." It just didn't work for me, with a lot of the jokes feeling flat and the premise being just plain goofy. Now, taken in the context of this second part, it's clear that the first instalment was just setup for what is an extended "epic" saga in the tradition of "Imaginationland." (review 11)

These links also lead to short descriptions of the episodes and further links within the IGN website. In this case he does not expect the reader to remember these episodes, as he often does by not linking previous episodes but only mentioning them, as in this review where he mentions other episodes without links, or feels that in this case it serves his purpose to guide the reader a bit.

There was also a link to the season, displayed here in example 40:

> **Example 40** And, we're back. Season 12 of South Park ushers in with one of the more outrageous, or perhaps intentionally offensive bits in recent memory. (review 1)

The link leads to list of reviews of season 12 on the IGN website. There were links to the characters of the show in the reviews as well, as in example 41:

> **Example 41** It's also an inspired touch to have Butters be the kid who falls in – and then out- with the vampire kids. (review 14)

The link leads to a character profile of *Butters* on the IGN website. Episodes, seasons and the show were also mentioned several times without any links, sometimes in cursive. There were also a couple of examples where the author offered links to the IGN site that were not necessarily related to *South Park* only. In example 42 the writer provides a link of this kind:

> **Example 42** In our Idiot Box feature last week, I said it was possible that this season could run mediocre through its entirety – and we could still have a good season 13.

Behind the link the reader finds a weekly column written by IGN editors. Not surprisingly the writer of the reviews is also one of the writers of the column. In example 43 the writer mentions an interview with a creator of the show and provides a link to the episode which has been evaluated in the review:

> **Example 43** Make sure to also check out our new exclusive interview with *South Park* co-creator Matt Stone in which he discusses how the *South Park* team completed "About Last Night…" less than 24 hours after the election results were announced. (review 12)

The interview has also been written by the author himself. While the link in example 43 is related to the show, it presents well how the writer uses links to guide the reader to other articles and features on the IGN website.

6.5.2 References to films, television shows and books

There were several references to other television shows, films and books in the reviews. Some of them were mentioned without any links in italics, sometimes there were links and sometimes they were not in any way separated from the rest of the text. Some reviews included several references such as review 6, references could also be found in reviews 5, 7 and 12 which are not listed here. See also examples se ja se for more references.

Some reviews had references to a single film and some had references to several, depending on whether the film was evident in episode's storyline or if they were based on the author's observations and assumptions, as in example 44:

> **Example 44** When something isn't very funny, a *Wicker Man* reference doesn't seem to be the antidote to rectify the situation (though if you want to give Parker and Stone the literary benefit of the doubt, this may also be a reference to Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" - again... not that funny. (review 2)

Some of the episodes had a clear connection to a film in their storyline. In review 3 the film Heavy Metal was mentioned three times in cursive, once without and not once

linked. For example the episode *The China Problem* which was a about the film *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* and the episode *Elementary School Musical* which parodied the film High School Musical. In example 45 the author also addresses the creators of the show:

> **Example 45** The boys decided to go see *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* and Kyle hasn't been the same since. What's great about this is that, after everything else that's gone on in the country and the world – Matt and Trey clearly haven't been able to let *Indy 4* go either. (review8)

There were interesting connections between a couple of the reviews. Episodes 10 and 11 formed a two-part episode, so the reviews also had references to the same films. One of the references is displayed here in example 46:

> **Example 46** It helps that the show does some fun stuff using the "Cloverfield" or "Blair Witch" device with Randy and the video camera – and all of it juxtaposed with the truly ridiculous (and slightly adorable) footage of guinea pigs in suits. (review 11)

The link takes the reader to a short description of the film on the IGN website. *Cloverfield* which was mentioned three times in without linking in review10, is now linked in review 11. Note however, that *Blair Witch* is not. In review 5 there is a reference to a character in a film. This is interesting because the actual film is not mentioned; the author assumes the reader knows which film he is referring to. This is displayed in example 47:

> **Example 47** He's going to "reach these kids!" the way Edvard James Olmos did as calculus teacher Jamie Escalante. (review 5)

In review 4 there was a reference to another television series, which is presented in example 48. In this case the author expects the reader to know that the show has earlier made fun of a particular television show:

> **Example 48** And while it feels like maybe they were falling back on old material one too many times(sudden violence, bashing *Family Guy*), the episode still manages to hold together. (review 4)

Whereas example 48 relies on the expectation that the reader knows that the show has made fun of another television show earlier, in example 49 the reference is based on the author's idea that the particular television show is not necessarily the best entertainment available. However, he does seem to make the assumption that the reader shares this point of view:

> **Example 49** With the economy in the tank, an ugly election cycle in full swing and a new season of *According to Jim* looming over the horizon like a swarm of overweight, verbally abusive and decidedly unfunny locusts – it's good to able to laugh at truly tasteless things again. (review 8)

There were also examples in the texts in which the author provides a link to the television series he has referred to. In example 50 he refers also to books and films at the same time:

> **Example 50** "The Ungroundable" launches off the latest vampire fad, born mostly out of the "Twilight" series of novels and coming movie, and perhaps the popularity of True Blood as a book and TV series as well. (review 14)

The first link leads to a short description of the episode, the second to a description of the film *Twilight* and the third to a short description of the series *True Blood*, all of them on the IGN website.

6.5.3 References to people

There were several references made to real life people in the reviews as well, mostly in cases where these people were connected to the episode. Some of them were also featured as characters in the episodes, for instance Jimmy Buffet, mentioned in example 34, who is featured in episode 1 as a character. Other real life phenomena were also mentioned, such as the writers' strike in review 4. The episode which is reviewed, "Canada on Strike", revolves around the screenwriters' strike in the United States and as a result the author mentions for instance the Writers Guild of America, Southparkstudios.com, Comedy Central, Youtube and NBC Universal. These are all

mentioned without links or cursives. In the review of episode 4 the references were connected to the author's evaluation of how well the episode had grasped the idea its storyline dealt with.

Episode 13 dealt with the 2008 election in the United States and the episode features among others Barack Obama and John McCain as characters. In most of the reviews, the writer did not provide links to specific people unlike in example 51:

> **Example 51** Not only were they banking on a <u>Barack Obama</u> victory (as I suppose just about every in the country was guessing anyway), but they were able to use actual clips from both <u>John McCain</u> and Obama's election night speeches. (review 12)

The links take the reader to personal profiles of both *Barack Obama* and *John McCain* on the IGN website. Possibly because of the importance of the theme for the American audience, there are links to these people. In most cases people are treated as in example 52, mentioned only as characters in the story without any links or italics:

> **Example 52** There's a riff on the Accused, a nod to Deliverance and ultimately Lucas and Spielberg are caught raping a stormstrooper. (review 8)

References to people can also be found for instance in examples 1, 11, 14, 16, 18 and 30. Interestingly enough, the writer also provides a link when talking about the creators of the show in example 53:

> **Example 53** <u>Matt</u> and <u>Trey</u> seem to be holding up their hands to say "Okay everyone, calm the f*** down." (review 12)

The link leads to personal profiles of the creators if the show, again on the IGN website.

It is worth mentioning that the writer does not often provide links to the creators to the show and they are often mentioned without links or italics, as in example 1 for instance.

Besides the findings related to the categories of engagement, there are two aspects of the reviews that stand out in the analysis. First, there are several references to films, television and people in the reviews. Second, there are several links provided in the texts leading to the other web pages on the IGN website. As with the resources of engagement, these aspects create an expectation of the reader of these reviews.

7 DISCUSSION

The results of the appraisal analysis are discussed in the following sections. The results were surprising in the sense that even though the texts were, by definition, argumentative, evaluative texts, they did not extensively use those options of engagement which would normally be expected of argumentative texts, that is proclaim and attribute. Instead, the options of engagement which were more commonly used, were the ones more connected to the ones focusing on creating solidarity between the writer and the reader, that is disclaim and entertain. Another feature that stood out was the overwhelming number of intertextual references found in the texts. In terms of characteristics specific to online reviews, the most obvious were the numerous links in the reviews. I will first go through the results from the analysis of engagement, moving on to intertextuality and links.

7.1 Writer-reader relationships

In this section I will discuss the results of the analysis of engagement resources according to the four categories of engagement: disclaim, proclaim, entertain and attribute. First I will go through the results from the category of disclaim and then move on to the category of entertain. I will then discuss the results from the categories of proclaim and attribute.

An important aspect of the category of engagement and its subcategory of disclaim was whether the denials were directed to the reader or to a third party outside the present writer-reader relationship. By projecting the denial towards either the reader or a third party, the author could construct two different types of putative reader. A reader who was susceptible to the "wrong" kinds of opinions, which in this case would be opinions not typical to *South Park*'s fan community, and one that needed to be convinced of the value

of the author's opinion, as in example 5. The other kind of reader would be one that has certain beliefs that the author needs to correct, as in example 1. This type of correction would be acceptable because of the author's greater expertise. This kind of distinction between the two kinds of readers is evident in appraisal theory as presented in chapter 3.

One might expect the constructed reader of reviews to be of the type that needs to be convinced and this was to some extent present in the reviews. The reviews seem to be directed to fans of the show that already have strong opinions about the show, so in order to ensure that they agree with the writer, he may indeed require quite strong arguments. According to Martin and White (2005: 120) correcting the reader creates solidarity if the reader does not mind being corrected. Do the reviews, then, create solidarity or do they attempt to forward the author's opinions no matter what? Based on traditional reviews one might expect that the focus would be on forwarding the author's views. Domsch (2009: 225) states that an attempt to persuade the reader is part of the expectations of the genre of review. In these reviews, however, the focus seems to be on creating solidarity. There were rather few examples of corrective denials. Rather than expecting the reader to be in need of guidance, the author expects the reader to share his knowledge and therefore avoids correcting their views, as in example 6. Hyland (2005: 175-176) states that an evaluation is always related to some standard; writers' evaluations are restricted by their communities and their assumptions. Hyland (2005: 175) adds that "meanings are ultimately produced in the interaction between writers and readers in specific social circumstances". While he states this in relation to academic writing, this is certainly true of online reviews as well, as the writer needs to consider the kind of audience he is writing for.

Because of the type of the texts analysed, one would expect the category of proclaim to be very commonly used. However, in these reviews the category entertain is more commonly used. The main purpose of entertaining is to create solidarity even among those who do not share the writer's view. The assumption is that the audience is divided, in this case readers who feel the same way about the episode as the writer and ones that disagree with his views. This would infer that the reviews are in fact, intended for

readers who have already seen the episodes, as only readers who have seen them could be expected to have an opinion on the episode. The reviews would not only function as a reference to see the episode or as an instruction not to see it, but also serve as a discussion starter for the online fan community. Entertaining was very commonly used in the reviews. The number of entertaining locutions would suggest a strong emphasis on trying to please the online community. Entertaining was also commonly used when the author discussed the creators of the show. This could also originate in the importance of the online community; the author needs to respect the creators as they are also admired by his readers. Domsch (2009: 225-226) suggests that the authority of a traditional review depends on the visibility of the text; centrally placed reviews tend to use stronger evaluative statements than the less visible ones. Since the reviews analysed in this study seem to avoid stronger evaluative statements, it would suggest that the reviews analysed in this study are visible to a smaller audience despite the theoretical visibility to everyone online.

By proclaim we refer to those locutions which narrow down dialogistic alternatives without directly rejecting them. Proclaim deals with what kinds of values or beliefs the author presents as universal. First, concurrence is related to the writer presenting himself as communicating with the reader while aligning the reader to his point of view. In the reviews the intent to communicate with the reader was evident in that there were several leading questions directly addressing the reader. This supports the idea that the audience is more important than mere evaluation. At the same the writer creates a community by presenting certain values as valid and expecting the reader to share these views. Second, endorsement is about the author presenting external viewpoints as valid and excluding other points of view. These kinds of locutions were few in the reviews. This would suggest that the opinions of the writer are considered more important and references to other reviewers would not add to the writer's authority. Third, pronouncement refers to authorial interventions in the texts. These too were few and far between in the reviews, even though they are often used in journalistic commentaries.

The lack of pronouncements would suggest that the focus is on communicating with the

reader and enhancing solidarity rather than forwarding the writer's points of view. When discussing online product reviews and the most influential literary reviewers, Domsch (2009: 221) notes that the most influential critic relies on the community of her readers to secure her status. Even though the concept of customer product review, or book review, is different from online reviews this does support the idea that when it comes to online reviews, the reader community is very important.

Attribution works to create solidarity by making space for alternate opinions much like entertain. As a whole the category of attribute was not particularly common. However, the subcategory of distancing, especially scare quotes, were more common in the reviews. They seemed to function as a way to avoid responsibility of vague or touchy terms as well as a way to create humour in the texts. While quoting specialists and other reviewers is typical of traditional reviews, attribution was not among the popular categories in the reviews. This would suggest that the focus is on the author's own opinions rather than what other reviewers have said about the show. Lihua (2009: 64) sees the lack of sources other than the author as enhancing the authority of the editorials. In a similar way, the lack of other voices in online reviews adds to the authority of the writer. Rather than presenting himself as an expert by quoting other writers, the author relies on his own positions. He creates his authority through communicating with the reader and by maintaining solidarity rather than referring to what others have said about the episodes.

7.2 Intertextuality creating expectations

There were several intertextual references to films, television shows and people in the reviews. Some of them can be regarded as a result of the type of television show the reviews were about: *South Park* often makes references to films, television shows, celebrities and politicians. Often they are directly mentioned or even included as characters in the episodes. Therefore it can be expected that reviews about the show include at least some of these.

When discussing literary criticism, Domsch(2009: 224) notes that reviews use quotations from the book that is being reviewed extensively and while the amount has decreased, they are still a common feature of the genre. He adds that quotations bring in generic characteristics from the referred work and that through quotations other genres are present in reviews. Even though I have not been studying literary reviews, this does in some ways concur with the results of this study; characteristics of the show are present in the reviews. Also, there were quotations from the episodes in the reviews, such as lines that the characters had in the episodes, which seemed to be connected to the description of the storyline.

However, there were also references in the reviews to films and television shows that were not clearly mentioned in the episodes. They relied solely on the author's observations and cultural knowledge. Most of these references were not in any way explained; see for instance examples 44, 47 and 52, in which the author assumes that the reader knows what he is talking about. This creates a certain type of reader to the reviews; one that has the same kind of cultural knowledge as the writer. Not only does the writer expect the reader to understand all of the references, but also expects the reader to be as informed about the show as he is, as in example 48. This would infer that these reviews were intended for a specific group. That is, people who have been watching the show for a longer time and who are fans.

When discussing online reviews of video games, Ivory (2009: 106) notes that video games are more easily analysed through reviews than the actual games. One could argue that online reviews of a television show could also offer a way to analyse the actual show and its content. The online reviews of South Park certainly present an image of the show. Intertextual references as well as references to current events and real life people are present in both the reviews and the episodes. To what extent online reviews as a genre offer insights into the genre they evaluate presents an interesting topic for further studies.

7.3. Online characteristics

Obvious indications of the reviews being online were the links found in the texts. When discussing the migration of literary criticism into the internet, Domsch (2009: 230) sees hyperlinking as a computer-mediated form of traditional citations. What was a reference in traditional reviews can now be replaced with the actual referenced text. This can result in an unending chain of references and adds to the presence of other texts in the reviews. While there are differences between traditional literary reviews and online revies, these notions hold for at least to some extent; instead of presenting another television series in the text the writer can offer a link to a description of that particular series. Also, one finding that stood out was that the links provided in the reviews lead to other web pages on the IGN site. This could be mandatory for the company's websites. Whether these kinds of links are obligatory or not, they nevertheless work to promote the web site. The reader is provided with links and guided to certain pages. This is quite similar to the way writers in traditional reviews mention and list books and authors that they see as related to the book being reviewed.

 Some of the links seemed to function in a helpful way, giving information about the episodes, the series and for example movies the writer referred to. Interestingly enough, only a minority of the several references to films for example were linked. This suggests that the writer assumes the reader to be acquainted with these films. One aspect that affects the links on the websites is of course how readers use them. Some readers may click on all of the links provided where as some will ignore all of them. One can therefore only guess the real functionality of the links. When discussing online reviews of films, Taboada (2011: 251) claims that the difference between printed and online reviews lies in the audience. Online movie reviews are produced for peers in order to be helpful. Newspaper critics, however, are considered professionals and therefore distant. Also, printed reviews are usually checked by an editor and revised while online reviews are probably posted without checks or revisions. South Park reviews seem to lie somewhere in the middle. The reviews are quite similar which would infer that there are some restrictions given by the website. Also, the writer would seem to be a professional

though he sometimes seems to be writing to his peers.

To sum up, the results show that the writer constructs a putative reader by choosing certain kinds of engagement resources. There is a clear emphasis on creating and enhancing solidarity between the writer and his readers. The reviews include a considerable number of references to for example films and musicians, which also add expectations to the putative reader. In terms of characteristics specific to online reviews, the results show that links are commonly used.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to investigate the linguistic methods and tools applied in online reviews to express opinions, to evaluate, to criticize and to complement. The focus was on reviews because of their evaluative and argumentative nature. Furthermore, this study set out to study online reviews as a genre, as there are few studies available on the subject. This study set out to investigate online reviews from the perspective of discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics and appraisal analysis.

The results show that the options of engagement which were more commonly used were the ones more connected to the ones focusing on creating solidarity between the writer and the reader, that is disclaim and entertain. The engagement resources which would normally be expected of argumentative texts, that is proclaim and attribute, were not commonly used. The engagement resources that were used aimed to create and enhance solidarity between the writer and the reader. It seems the author creates his authority through communicating with the reader and by maintaining solidarity. Together with the overwhelming number of intertextual references found in the texts, the engagement resources constructed two types of putative reader for the reviews. There were numerous links found in the reviews that seemed to guide the reader as well as promote the website, and would appear to be a characteristic specific to online reviews.

The appraisal framework provided me with theoretical and analytical tools for analysing how writers connect to their readers. Occasionally the categories and frames given in the framework would seem somewhat obscure. Creating lists and tables was a necessity at the beginning of the analysis because of the considerable number of examples to be found in the reviews. Also, deciding on which category a certain piece of text belonged to was at times rather difficult. The data used in this study proved to be very interesting and challenging. For a detailed appraisal analysis it would perhaps be useful to limit the

number of reviews even more or narrow down the focus of the study. That is, it could be useful to conduct a study focusing on only one of the categories of engagement. With regard to online reviews as a genre the study revealed some interesting findings, for example that links were commonly used. However, because of the limited set of data that was used in this study, those findings do not allow for generalisations of the genre as a whole.

Even though the results of this study do not allow for generalisations, the present study still manages to provide new information about online reviews as a genre. Further studies are needed to describe online reviews as a genre. In terms of appraisal analysis this study is an example of the many ways in which the appraisal framework can be used. There is still room for further studies on appraisal as well. There are subcategories of engagement resources that this study does not investigate. For example the combinations of denials and countering were a re-occurring feature in the reviews. The two other categories of appraisal, attitude and graduation could also be studied in relation to online reviews.

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