What makes a good Linguistics critical review?

**Commentary on Review**

1. **Analysing the topic**
   Notice how the topic is asking students to do two things - to summarise the text and to evaluate it. When reading a text, keep these two points in mind:
   - What is the text saying? (summary)
   - What do I think about what it's saying? (evaluation)

2. **The text being reviewed**
   Always commence your review by including the full bibliographic details of the work under review.

3. **Introduction**
   The opening sentence of the review should be relevant to the broad issues of the topic, without resorting to cliché.

4. **Summarising the text**
   A good summary will do the following:
   - accurately represent the idea in the original text
   - focus on the more important ideas
   - be perfectly comprehensible to someone who has not read the original text

5. **Summarising the text - A) Introducing the text**
   This review gives an overview of the text by introducing:
   - the text and its author
   - the main content covered in the text
   - the author's main argument
   The most important of these is the main argument - what is the author saying?

6. **Summarising the text - B) Summarising the supporting evidence**
   Many academic texts present:
   - a main argument
   - evidence to support that argument
   When reading a text to be reviewed, think about the connection between the main argument and the evidence, and how well this connection has been established.

**Topic**

Write a critical review of Wolfson's article, 'Compliments in Cross-Cultural Perspective'. In your review you should summarise the text and then evaluate it (800 words)

**Sample review**


Teaching how to communicate effectively is now seen as a major goal of language teachers, both those teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) and second-language learning in general. The differences in norms of interaction between cultures, as explored in Hymes' work on the ethnography of speaking (1962), have since been highlighted through further sociolinguistic work. Such work includes an investigation into the formal instruction of the speech acts of giving and responding to compliments (Ishihara, 2004) and an examination of inductive and deductive approaches for teaching compliments and compliment responses (Rose & Kwai-fong, 2001).

In the article *Compliments in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Wolfson explores the speech act of complimenting, specifically in regards to its utility for second-language learners of English, through analysis of the semantic and syntactic structures of compliments. With her colleague, Joan Manes, Wolfson analysed complimenting behaviour in American English, and has, in addition, constructed a corpus of compliments used by non-native speakers in interactions with members of their own speech communities. With this data, Wolfson has concluded that speech acts, and compliments in particular, may often vary considerably across cultures, and there may not be consensus, conscious or otherwise, about what is classed as a compliment even within the same language community.

In order to support this contention, Wolfson presents translated examples of compliments from speakers of languages other than English, to illustrate the linguistic and pragmatic differences between the complimenting behaviour of speakers of American English and non-Americans. She states that, in Indonesian, for example, mentioning a friend's purchase of a sewing machine or recent completion of grocery shopping functions as complimenting an addressee, as one is showing approval of the addressee's accomplishments. In contrast, a similar compliment given to an American may not be construed as it is intended, as a compliment. Wolfson subsequently advises against being too hasty in concluding that the speech acts of complimenting are identical in Japanese and American societies, due to the similarities in their complimenting behaviours. Wolfson adds that miscomprehension often works in both directions, in that non-Americans may construe compliments in American English as being insulting rather than flattering.

A contrast between the use of compliments in American English, Persian and Arabic, for example, shows that speakers of the latter two languages often employ proverbs or precoded ritualised phrases for complimenting. Americans do not generally use proverbs in this manner for complimenting, and in fact rely on a very restricted group of lexical and syntactic structures, the majority (80%) of which, are adjectival in nature. Of the 72 adjectives identified in the corpus, five - *nice, good, beautiful, pretty and great* - account for around two-thirds of all the adjectival compliments. In regards to verbs, *like* and *love* occurred in 86% of compliments where there was a semantically positive verb. Wolfson analysed the data and found that 53.6% of the corpus made use of a single syntactic pattern:
Wolfson identified another two syntactic patterns, which accounted for another 16.1% and 14.9% of the data respectively:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{NP} \quad \text{is} \quad \text{(really)} \quad \text{ADJ} \\
&\text{I} \quad \text{looks} \quad \text{(really)} \quad \text{like} \quad \text{NP} \\
&\text{PRO} \quad \text{is} \quad \text{(really)} \quad \text{(a)} \quad \text{ADJ} \quad \text{NP}
\end{align*}
\]

From a corpus of 700 responses, Wolfson found that 85% of the compliments conformed to one of the 3 patterns above. From this, Wolfson concluded that the use of these patterns in ESL classrooms would be advantageous to students, who would then have knowledge of the form, as well as the function, of syntactic patterns as used by native speakers.

Leaving aside the positive developments which Wolfson's study added to our knowledge of compliments and complimenting behaviour, there are several criticisms which can be levelled at this work. First of all, a shortcoming of Wolfson's study that has also been levelled against other ethnographic studies, regards the method of data collection. This method is referred to as 'reduced', as it collapses rich and varied data into utterances that can be easily written down in a notebook (Nelson, Al Batal & El Bakary, 2002:45).

Another key criticism of this study is that compliments tend to be context-dependent, as Jiang (2006:39) states. For this reason, the use of formulaic responses will have limited utility, unless the English learner has an understanding, at the pragmatic level as well as linguistic, of the factors of the nature of the interaction and the relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

In addition, Wolfson supplies virtually no sociocontextual information regarding how and where the subjects acquired their tokens of complimenting behaviour, nor on the subjects themselves. Finally, Wolfson is criticised for the use of 'explicit' comments, which, related to the first point regarding data collection, focuses on the formulaic compliments at the expense of 'implicit' ones, missing "those [compliments] in which the value judgement is presupposed and/or implicated by Gricean maxims" (Boyle, 2000:28). In other words, the methodology of her research has therefore limited the type of data which is examined.

Despite the above criticisms, Wolfson's study has been instrumental in exploring compliments as an area of linguistic and pragmatic research, particularly in regards to their utility for the instruction of learners of English.

References

Tables
When using tables that are presented in a text, ensure that they are a faithful reproduction of the original, with the correct information present.

Signalling the shift to evaluation
It is very important to signal when the summary of the text has stopped, and when the evaluation has begun.

Signalling the type of evaluation
It is important to make the nature of the evaluation clear - whether your comments are favourable or not. Notice the range of words and expressions used to signal a negative response to material, such as:
- a shortcoming of Wolfson's study...
- Wolfson is criticised for...
- Another key criticism of this study is...

Quoting
When you quote from a text, you need to use quotation marks and indicate the exact page numbers from which the quote originates. But avoid using too many quotes - instead opt for paraphrasing, and save quotes for important ideas.

References
Only list the additional texts you have cited in the review, not texts you have only read.

11. Structure of the review
The sample review is structured in a very conventional way, with a clear division of:
- summary of the text
- evaluation of the text
  - negative
  - positive
There are other possibilities, such as summarising the first part of a text and then evaluating it, before moving on to the second section.