

The interpretation study in English applied linguistics Research Article Discussions (RADs) in reputable journals

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Abstract

Since studies on rhetorical structures of research article discussions (RADs) have received scholarly attention from many linguistics scholars, interpreting research findings becomes one of the important linguistic aspects that needs to be investigated for knowledge expansion in research. However, although some scholars have studied rhetorical moves in RADs, none of them focus on interpretation as a single focus. As a result, interpretation still leaves several questions that need further analysis. After understanding this critical gap, this study intends to address three important purposes: the role of interpretation in applied linguistics Research Article Discussions (RADs) in international reputable journals, the elements that authors interpret, and rhetorical strategies for interpretation. To realize these purposes, this study used a genre-based approach by conducting top-down and bottom-up approaches for the analysis. Then, it employed a mixed-method to report the analysis results. The findings revealed that interpretation is quasi-obligatory in RADs. Authors interpret their research findings and their discussion. They employed two rhetorical strategies to realize interpretation as presented further in the results section. These findings have implications to extend knowledge in the literature regarding interpretation knowledge and create a contribution to provide understanding for students and novice authors.

Keywords

English applied linguistics, interpretation, RADs, and rhetorical strategies

Introduction

Studies on rhetorical structures of research articles (RAs) have been widely conducted since the work of Swales (1990) had influenced English academic writing for publication in this globe. All sections of RAs have been analyzed to contribute awareness for students and novice scholars and teaching English for academic purposes, for example the abstract section (Amnuai, 2019; Can et al., 2016; Doró, 2013; Warsidi, 2022b), introduction section (Abdi & Sadeghi, 2018; Wang & Yang, 2015; Warsidi, 2024b; Warsidi, Halim, et al., 2025; Zainuddin & Shaari, 2021), results and discussion section (Abbasi Montazeri et al., 2021; Mozaheb, 2015; Warsidi, Adnan, et al., 2025; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024; Yu, 2023), and many more. This study intends to focus the discussion section because this section may produce an understanding of how knowledge is constructed in research (Moyano, 2019) and rhetorically prove claims in research (Parkinson, 2011). Thus, the discussion section has a critical role in research articles.

Studies that focus on the discussion section in RAs have been widely carried out with various focuses. For example, some scholars focused their analyses on the move structures of the discussion section (Kim et al., 2016; Loi et al., 2016; Yu, 2023), argument styles (Arsyad, Purwo, et al., 2020; Arsyad, Zaim, et al., 2020; Lubis, 2020), stances (Alotaibi, 2021; Cheng & Unsworth, 2016; Phongjit & Gampper, 2023), academic conflict (Cheng & Unsworth, 2016; Sadeghi & Alinasab, 2020; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024), negotiating implication (Cheng, 2020), and many more. However, although research article discussions (RADs) have been widely investigated by various linguistic scholars worldwide, studies on this important section that focus on interpreting research findings are hardly found in the literature. The following paragraphs review any study that contains interpretation within RADs.

In earlier research, interpretation of research findings was conducted more dominant in qualitative research than quantitative research, in which 17 of 20 RADs in the English Language Teaching (ELT) and linguistics employed interpretation in qualitative research, while only 10 of 20 data employed it in quantitative research (Hilmi & Afifi, 2021), which indicates that qualitative research seems to have more interpretation than those of quantitative research. It is also in line with another study that qualitative RADs contain more interpretation than those of quantitative RADs (Dobakhti, 2013). Then, interpretation seems the most important strategy for commenting on the research findings (Le & Harrington, 2015; Nguyen & Pramoolsook, 2015; Suherdi et al., 2020). These studies imply that interpretation is an important strategy to comment on research findings, but qualitative research tends to employ it more than quantitative research.

However, although interpretation has been studied earlier, as reviewed above, some questions remain unclear and need further research. For example, to what extent is the importance of interpretation in RADs? What do authors interpret? How do they interpret? These questions need further analysis to provide more comprehension of interpretation ways and what elements need to be interpreted in RADs. Based on understanding this need, this study intends to address this call by addressing the following three questions:

1. To what extent does the interpretation employed in Applied Linguistics Research Article Discussions (RADs) in reputable journals?
2. What do authors interpret in their RADs?
3. What rhetorical strategies do authors employ to make interpretations in their RADs?

Answering the three questions above in this study may provide theoretical insights into knowledge production because the results address knowledge gaps as found in the literature. Besides, the results may also create a practical contribution for awareness to students or novice authors about interpreting research findings. Also, the results can be used to design teaching materials for publication courses. Thus, addressing the three questions above becomes the purpose of this study.

Method

Research Design

This study used genre-based based-analysis for analyzing data sets because this approach is reliable for analyzing communicative events within academic texts, such as research articles, as employed in earlier genre studies (Bilal & Shehzad, 2019; El-Dakhs, 2018; Swales, 1990; Warsidi, 2021, 2025a). For the report, this study employed a mixed-method design by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches for analyzing its data. A quantitative approach was employed to identify the number of interpretations that appeared in the data sets and then presented in a table and figure. Then, a qualitative approach was used to describe and interpret the findings, including providing examples found in the present study. Employing this combined approach may support the analysis results becoming more convincing than one approach alone.

Data Sets

This study used 30 RADs published in English applied linguistics in the reputable journals quartile 1 (Q1) with Scimago journal ranks (SJR) higher than 1.1 because journals in this indexing status are considered highly qualified. The reason for analyzing these numbers as a data set is that they were considered to have represented a corpus (Adnan, 2011; Warsidi, 2023b) in applied linguistics in reputable journals, as they have been included in this rank. The journals are *English for Specific Purposes*, *English for Academic Purposes*, and *Applied Linguistics*. From these selected journals, ten corpus numbers (RADs) were chosen from each by applying the following procedures. First, the corpus was published between 2020 and 2025 because they are considered new publications. Second, RADs in these journals were open access because this criterion allows the section to be accessed more easily and freely. Third, the RADs contained an explicit and separated discussion section, with no combination with the results section.

Data Analysis

For analyzing data, this study employed earlier genre analysis approaches: top-down and bottom-up approaches (Warsidi et al., 2024; Warsidi, Adnan, et al., 2025; Warsidi, Halim, et al., 2025). A top-down approach was conducted by reading the corpus starting from the top texts to the bottom texts by focusing on identifying any functional meaning that indicates 'interpretation', such as identifying some linguistic signals such as "*it is likely, it suggests that, it means, the finding implies*", and so on. Then, a bottom-up approach was used to focus on the identified texts that indicate interpretation. In this regard, every single identified text was analyzed to ensure whether it is an interpretation, the context is also an interpretation, and the meaning is also as it is. By following these serial steps of the analytical approach, the analysis results may become convincing.

Then, to ensure the status of the interpretation, this study used earlier framework categories (Warsidi, 2022a, 2024a, 2024b). The purpose is to determine whether interpretation in RADs published in applied linguistics is obligatory, quasi-obligatory, conventional, or optional. By referring to this approach, the status of interpretation in RADs can be discovered.

Results

After analyzing data in the present study, the results showed three important findings regarding the roles of interpretation in RADs, the elements interpreted in RADs, and the rhetorical strategies used in interpretation. These three findings are further described in the following subsections.

The Roles of Interpretation

The analysis results revealed that interpretation is quasi-obligatory in RADs in the present study because 27 of 30 RADs made interpretations in their RADs. This means that 90% of the total corpus contains interpretation. More details of the interpretation findings in RADs found in this study are presented in Figure 1.

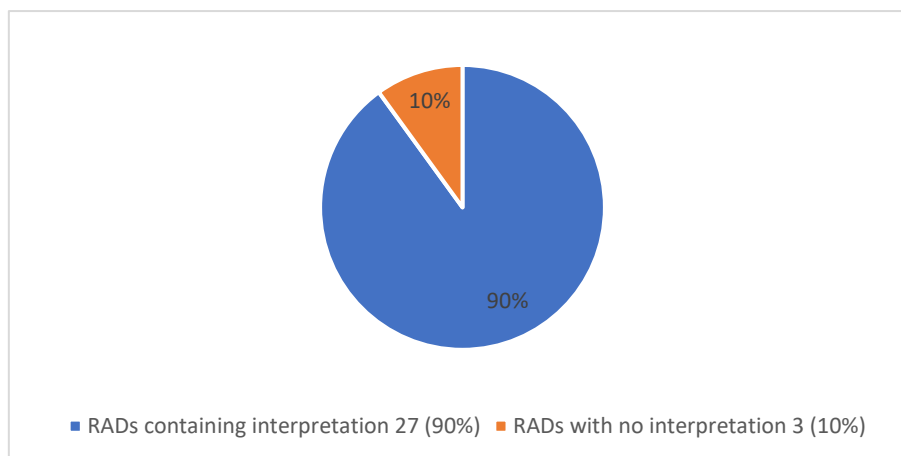


Fig. 1. Interpretation in English applied linguistics RADs

As presented in Figure 1, the majority of English applied linguistics RADs contain interpretation, while a few of them do not contain interpretation. This finding suggests that the role of interpretation is quasi-obligatory in this study because it appeared in a range of 60-99%.

Elements Interpreted in RADs

The analysis results in this study showed two elements interpreted in English applied linguistics RADs: interpreting findings and interpreting discussion. However, interpreting findings is employed more than interpreting the discussion. Further details of this finding are figured out in Figure 2 as follows:

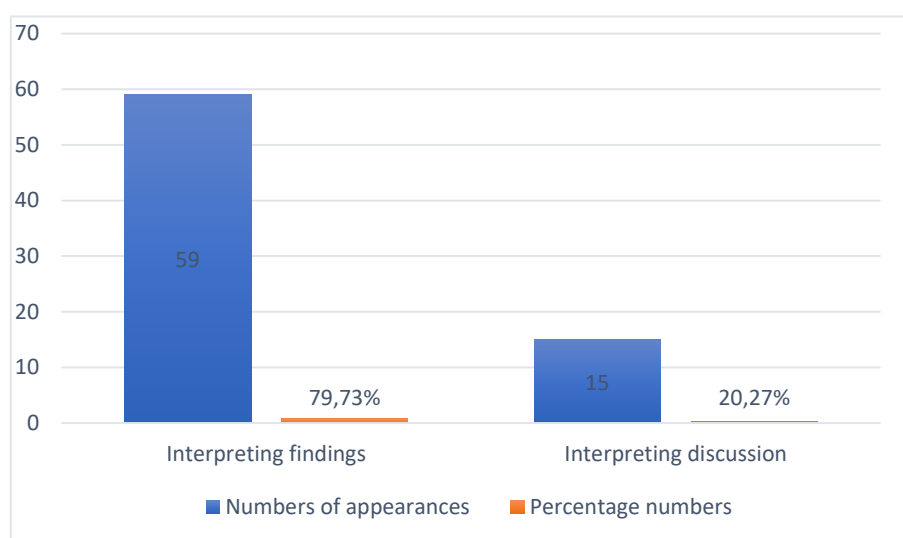


Fig. 2. Elements interpreted in English applied linguistics RADs

Figure 2 above shows that interpreting findings is more dominant than interpreting the discussion. This finding indicates that interpreting findings is more important than interpreting the discussion. The reason is possibly that the focus of the discussion section is discussing the findings of the study, and thus, interpreting findings becomes important in the discussion section. More description about interpreting findings and interpreting discussion is exemplified as follows:

Interpreting Findings

Interpreting findings appears in most of the corpus, and thus, it becomes important in RADs. The ways authors interpret their research findings are exemplified:

Ex.1: "It found that all three levels (meaning level, wordform level, and child level) were independently important... **This suggests that** the rate at which children encounter specific meanings of words in texts is important for their word learning." (Corpus 1)

Ex. 2: "**These findings** provide a strong **indication that** advanced L2 speakers adapt their speech style to reflect changing contextual demands of the spoken activity in which they are engaged." (Corpus 4)

Ex. 3: "Results showed only two out of eight relevant comparisons were statistically significant, **indicating that**, for the most part, bilinguals do not process target language structures absent from their dominant language in substantially different ways than those present." (Corpus 6)

The three examples above indicate that authors interpret their research findings by either describing their findings and then interpreting them, or directly and explicitly interpreting their findings. In Ex. 1 and Ex. 3, authors describe their findings and then interpret their findings, while Ex. 2 explicitly interprets its findings directly. Thus, the three examples above imply that authors interpret their research findings.

Interpreting Discussion

Interpreting the discussion was conducted after discussing findings, comparing or contrasting research findings with the literature. The ways authors interpret their discussion are presented within examples below.

Ex. 4: "Finally, **a statistical comparison** of rate of priming between the HL and L1 group and between the.... **This indicates** strong similarities between the production mechanisms of bilinguals and monolinguals and, to the extent structural priming can measure syntactic knowledge implicitly, also the abstract representation of the four structures in the three groups." (Corpus 4)

Ex. 5: "**Comparison across the ten L1 populations represented** in the learner corpus shows that learner behaviour is quite homogeneous, **which suggests that** differences from expert use are more likely to be developmental than L1-induced, although L1 transfer may also play a role." (Corpus 17)

Ex. 6: "For example, Casal (2020) **also found that** Applied Linguistics trended towards high levels of complexity and Economics towards lower levels across the assessed measures in RA Introductions in an analysis which included two Engineering disciplines. **This suggests that** these disciplinary differences detected here exist beyond social sciences." (Corpus 19)

The underlined and bolded texts above indicate that authors make an interpretation, while the bolded texts earlier indicate a discussion of research findings. Thus, the three examples above are included in the interpreting discussion.

Rhetorical Strategies to Make an Interpretation

The rhetorical analysis showed differences between how to interpret findings and how to interpret the discussion. Although both interpreting findings and interpreting discussion employ two rhetorical strategies, their rhetorical strategies are different from one another. More details of rhetorical strategies to interpret findings and the discussion are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Rhetorical strategies to interpret research findings and the discussion

Rhetorical strategies	Interpreting findings	Interpreting discussion
Strategy 1	Describing findings shortly	Discussing the findings with the literature
Strategy 2	Interpreting the findings	Interpreting the discussion

Table 1 above shows that interpreting findings is conducted by employing two strategies: describing findings and then interpreting them. However, interpreting the discussion is done through two strategies: discussing the findings with the literature and then interpreting the discussion. More details of strategies to interpret findings and discussion are exemplified in Figures 3 and 4:

Our further investigation focused on exploring variation in research writing practices in terms of vocabulary use across different sections of research articles. The analysis showed that the dispersion of high frequency words substantially varied across the IMRD sections of research articles. On average, more narrowly dispersed words accounted for more than three-fifth of high-frequency word types across the sections, whereas more widely dispersed words were found to accommodate about 30 percent of these words. This finding suggests that there is a considerable degree of unevenness in single-word vocabulary use across the main sections of research articles. Further differences were identified by looking at these results in light of

Fig. 3. Rhetorical strategies to interpret findings (Corpus 23)

As exemplified in Figure 3 above, there are two rhetorical strategies to interpret research findings. The green highlight is the way authors describe or present their research findings, while the yellow highlight is the way authors interpret their research findings. These two rhetorical strategies, describing the research findings and interpreting findings, are commonly found in the present data set.

more than that in the soft disciplines, implying that research writing in the sciences demands the knowledge of a type of vocabulary that has a narrow range of use and applicability. These results corroborate those of Durrant (2014), who found that university students' writing in Science and Technology fields makes greater use of specialized vocabulary, compared to Social Sciences and Humanities. The patterns observed in the present study extend Durrant's (2014) findings by indicating that disciplinary differences in the degree of reliance on specialized vocabulary (with narrow range of applicability) is even more pronounced in writing for research publication purposes. This indicates that conventional practices of disciplinary communities can have a profound impact on the lexical choices that members make in this particular genre of writing. Moreover, this finding also provides evidence in support of the argument that regards research writing as a highly conventionalized genre in which disciplinary knowledge plays an important role in adhering to the linguistic expectations of the target readership (see Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2001; Swales, 1990).

Fig. 4. Rhetorical strategies to interpret discussion (Corpus 23)

As figured out in Figure 4, the authors also use two rhetorical strategies to interpret their discussion. In this regard, the green highlight is the way authors discuss their research findings, by comparing, relating, or contrasting their research findings to literature, while the purple highlight is their way to interpret their discussion.

In short, the analysis results indicate that interpretation is quasi-obligatory in English applied linguistics RADs. In this regard, there are two elements interpreted in RADs: interpreting findings and interpreting discussion. The strategies to interpret research findings are firstly presenting or describing research findings, and then interpreting them. Then, strategies to interpret the discussion are conducted by discussing the findings with either comparing or contrasting with the literature, and then interpreting

the discussion. These findings may create an understanding that interpretation needs to be addressed in RADs because it may advance meaningful research findings.

Discussion

The Roles of Interpretation

As found in the present analysis, interpretation in RADs is quasi-obligatory because 90% of the total corpus numbers contain interpretation. This finding suggests that creating meaningful findings and providing an understanding of RADs is important. The reason is probably that authors in the present study intend to attract their audience's attention through the arts of their new knowledge findings, and thus, interpreting their current research findings is very important. This finding supports earlier studies that interpretation is needed in the discussion section because it may provide a more complete understanding of the targeted phenomena (Johnson et al., 2020), to draw meanings based on data analysis results (Mezmir, 2020), and to withdraw sense making and deeper insights of findings (Lim & Kumar, 2024), and thus, by interpreting research findings, authors may promote their current research status to influence social changes (Castelló et al., 2021). However, interpretation must consider “fairness, privacy, reliability, robustness, causality, trust, fidelity, faithfulness, transferability, informativeness, transparency, plausibility, satisfaction, accountability, etc.” (Li et al., 2022, p. 3202). Besides, interpretation must be logical and supported with data and appropriate strong references (Behzadi & Gajdács, 2021).

Elements Interpreted in RADs

The present analysis showed two elements interpreted in RADs: interpreting research findings and interpreting discussion. However, interpreting findings appears to be much more dominant than interpreting the discussion. This finding implies that the main focus of the discussion section is to discuss current research findings, and thus, authors must interpret them to draw meaningful research insights and advance their research contribution. Besides, interpreting current findings may deepen understanding, connect findings to contexts, and consider various possible perspectives, while interpreting the discussion allows authors to revisit interpretative earlier research findings (Deane, 2020).

However, the present finding seems in contradiction with those found in Q1 journals in the education field, as interpretation was mostly absent from the corpus, as only 24% of the total corpus employed the interpretive move (Tikhonova et al., 2025). The possible reason for these contradictory findings is disciplinary variation. In this regard, authors in the education discipline prefer analytical and evaluative functions and tend to avoid interpretive communicative function (Tikhonova et al., 2025), while authors in applied linguistics in this study not only interpret their research findings, but also sometimes interpret their discussion. This variation implies that genre, in the case of interpretation, shares differences between authors in applied linguistics and education.

Strategies to Make Interpretation

Regarding the rhetorical strategies to interpret findings and the discussion, the present study found differences in reaching these two communicative moves. In interpreting research findings, authors employed two strategies: describing findings shortly and interpreting the findings. In interpreting the discussion, however, the authors discussed the findings in relation to the literature and interpreted their discussion. These findings suggested that interpreting either research findings or discussion needs strategies to reach communicative functions in texts. Thus, the findings imply that in reaching communicative functions in texts, authors use either two or more communicative events, such as claiming centrality in RAIs (Swales, 1990, 2004), justifying the study in RAIs (Adnan, 2010; Warsidi, 2021), establishing a niche in RAIs (Amnuai, 2021; Lim, 2012), promoting research (Warsidi, 2023a), establishing customers' interest in sales promotion (Warsidi, 2024a), realizing thesis statement in the international English language testing system (IELTS) (Warsidi, 2025b), and many more. This series of findings regarding rhetorical strategies in texts becomes evidence that rhetorical strategies are ways to reach communicative functions and small steps to reach communicative goals in texts. Thus, the present findings strengthen those found in earlier rhetorical studies as presented above, and these imply that interpreting research findings and discussion needs rhetorical strategies.

Conclusion

This section ends this study with three important conclusions. First, the finding revealed that the role of interpretation is quasi-obligatory in applied linguistics RADs. Second, there are two interpretation elements in RADs; they are interpreting findings and interpreting the discussion. However, interpreting findings is more dominant than interpreting the discussion. Third, to reach these two interpretation elements, authors employed two rhetorical strategies. For example, to interpret research findings, they used two strategies: by describing findings shortly and then interpreting the findings, while to interpret the discussion, they firstly discussed their findings in relation to the literature and then interpreted their discussion.

The findings of this study may contribute to extending knowledge of interpretation in RADs in the literature. Besides, they can also be used to design teaching materials and employed for teaching practices for English in academic classes. However, on the other hand, while these findings may provide a contribution, this study still contains weaknesses, as the corpus is from a single side, not comparing international authors with local authors, which may provide a more comprehensive understanding. Because of this limitation, this study recommends future research to compare interpretation studies in English vs. Indonesian RADs, and thus, the results may provide more comprehension, particularly for novice and student authors.

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