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The rhetorical strategies to create incremental innovation in applied linguistics research articles

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ABSTRACT

Rhetorical studies within research articles have received a growing concern among linguists worldwide. However, studies on this significant area to create incremental innovation are rarely found. Understanding this need has attracted the authors to conduct the present study by investigating rhetorical strategies authors use to create incremental innovation in their research articles and analyzing linguistic features used to create innovation for their current research. In an attempt to address these purposes, the present study analyzed 37 research article introductions (RAIs) from the disciplines of Applied Linguistics published in four reputable international journals (Q1) with the Scimago Journal Ranks (SJR) higher than 0,61. This study employed a newly designed framework and linguistic feature approaches from previous studies for the analysis. The results showed three rhetorical strategies to create incremental innovation in research articles. However, of these three, most authors tend to employ Strategy 2, Presenting the existing knowledge – and then – improving it in the present study, more than the other two strategies. Then, to realize incremental innovation, they employed six linguistic features, but of these six, two features (connective adverbs and phrases denoting examining a particular issue) appeared to be the most dominant in the present data.

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Convincing journal editors and reviewers regarding the value and novelty of our present academic research paper is very significant to getting our academic works accepted and published in their journals because they may contain research innovation. In this regard, research innovation is pivotal to creating more meaningful research findings and contributions. Likewise, in management business (Le, 2020), manufacturers and industries (Hervas-Oliver et al., 2021), innovation has been widely investigated, and it has two types: radical and incremental innovation. However, this study focused its analysis on incremental innovation in research articles because this innovation type is more dominant in research articles. Incremental innovation is a gradual improvement based on library research from earlier literature. In this study, library research refers to a process by which authors of research articles gradually innovate their current study based on earlier findings in the literature. It is to gain a deeper comprehension of a subject and to create impactful findings.

In order to convince journal gatekeepers that our academic papers contain this innovation type, research article authors need rhetorical strategies to achieve them. Concerning this growing concern issue, studies on rhetorical strategies have been widely conducted in English RAs, such as in the introduction section (Alharbi, 2021; Lu et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2021; Xiaofei et al., 2021), method section (Cotos et al., 2017; Lim, 2006; Morales, 2016; Zhang & Wannaruk, 2016), results and discussion (Suherdi et al., 2020), and discussion as a separate section (Dobakhti, 2016; Dobakhti & Zohrabi, 2018; Moreno, 2021; Moyano, 2019; Moyetta, 2016). These studies indicate that rhetorical structure is one of the considered issues to get our academic papers accepted or rejected.

In addition, rhetorical structure focusing on more specific communicative functions has also been investigated in many academic works, such as how to promote research (Afros & Schryer, 2009; Warsidi, 2023), and how to promote the significance of current research topics (Abdi & Sadeghi, 2018; Wang & Yang, 2015). Besides, rhetorical structure focusing on evaluating earlier knowledge claims (establishing a niche) has also received several scholarly attention (Amnuai, 2021; Lim, 2012). More specific and related to the present study concerning indicating a research gap has also been widely investigated (Arianto & Basthomi, 2021; Arianto et al., 2021; Arsyad & Zainil, 2023; Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015; Robinson et al., 2011; Suryani et al., 2015). These studies suggest that understanding functional rhetorical structure within research articles is significant.

Concerning rhetorical studies, a framework development has also been conducted to identify a research gap from a systematic review (Robinson et al., 2011). The results showed four important strategies to identify a research gap: presenting insufficient information, biased information, inconsistency, and incorrect information. This framework is beneficial in identifying a gap and indicates that conducting a systematic review is essential to identifying a research gap. Another framework development for identifying a gap has also been developed based on 40 qualitative literature reviews using a grounded theory (Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015). The purpose is to guide article authors in reviewing literature more rigorously and effectively. The results showed two categories of research gaps: characterization and presentation of research gaps. However, the characterization category seems to be most dominant in this finding. This category contains six sub-categories, but of the six, only knowledge void the most dominantly appeared in the study. However, although this study provided a framework for identifying a research gap, the framework still does not provide complete comprehension to readers, such as to what extent the intended localization, characterization, verification, and presentation are essential in the data.

The following study concerning the research gap was conducted in 150 research article introductions written by non-native English writers from computer science (Suryani et al., 2015). This study interviewed article authors regarding techniques to realize the research gap. The results revealed that 73% of the total corpus was employed, indicating a gap in their RAIs. Then, to realize this functional step, the authors employ four possible techniques: indicating the limitation of earlier studies, suggesting problematic issues that need further investigation, presenting the suggestion of previous researchers, and extending earlier research. This finding may create useful insights for the teaching and learning practice, particularly for writing a research paper.

Furthermore, a study concerning the importance of indicating a research gap has also been analyzed in both research article abstracts and introductions to determine the strategies authors employed to reach this functional step (Arianto et al., 2021). Data were collected from two purposive sets. The first data set includes 90 RAs from Indonesian doctoral students, Indonesian academics, and international authors, while the second data set is the interview results. The results revealed that international authors tend to indicate a more significant research gap than Indonesian authors in the abstracts and introduction sections. Then, the results showed five rhetorical strategies to state a research gap: highlighting the complete absence, stressing insufficient research, revealing limitations, contrasting previous research, and suggesting a solution(s). However, while international authors tend to stress insufficient earlier research and reveal the limitations of earlier research, Indonesian authors from both groups tend to suggest solutions to existing

problems. This finding indicates that international authors evaluate literature more than Indonesian authors, indicating a research gap (Arianto et al., 2021).

Besides, research gap strategies have also been investigated in 40 RAIs in the English Language Teachings discipline published in different Scopus journal quartiles, such as Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4, using the CARS model as an analytical framework (Arianto & Basthomi, 2021). The results revealed that the authors use five strategies to indicate a research gap. However, of the five strategies, stating insufficient earlier studies and suggesting solutions are the most frequently employed in the data. Then, RAIs published in Q1 journals employed more strategies to indicate a research gap than the others. Also, Q1 journals indicate more research gaps than Q2 journals, and Q2 journals employ more gaps than Q3 journals. This finding suggests that the higher the journal quartiles in this study, the more indicating gap numbers that they employ.

Research gap strategies have also been investigated in 40 applied linguistics RAIs published in different journal ranks (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023). The results showed five research gap strategies, but most authors tend to indicate a gap by presenting inadequate research and contradictive evidence from earlier research findings. In this regard, Q1 journal articles employed more strategies than the others. This finding implies that non-native English authors and novice authors should familiarize themselves with research gap strategies, and thus, they can write research papers for publishing in reputable journals.

The review above indicates that understanding the rhetorical strategies of research articles published in reputable journals is essential. Besides, the review also implies that comprehending research gaps strategies within RAIs also seems important to convince readers, particularly journal editors and reviewers, that our present research has novelty, innovation, and contribution to knowledge development. However, although the rhetorical structures of RAIs and research gap strategies have received much scholarly attention, they need to investigate how to bridge the research gap in their current research. Also, understanding what rhetorical strategies authors use to create incremental innovation in their current research remains to be explored. As stated in this introduction, incremental innovation is a gradual improvement of library research from earlier literature. Considering this gap into accounts may contribute to creating a more complete understanding for readers. It may help journal gatekeepers evaluate the contribution and novelty of their under-reviewed research papers. For this reason, this paper intends to investigate rhetorical strategies to create incremental innovation in research articles published in reputable applied linguistics journals with the following research questions:

1. What rhetorical strategies do authors employ to create incremental innovation in their current research?
2. What linguistic features do they use to create incremental innovation in their current research?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach was employed to discover functional units that indicate any related data that show the relationship between earlier studies and the current research. Then, a quantitative approach was used to count any appearance data of these functional units. The results of quantitative analysis are then reported descriptively within table forms.

Corpus Selection

Chronologically, this study primarily used 40 English RAIs that are published in four reputable international journals in the field of applied linguistics with Scimago Journal Ranks (SJR) higher than 0,61: *Applied Linguistics, English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes,* and *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. However, of these 40 numbers, only 37 contain incremental innovations. Thus, this study focused its analysis only on these 37 English RAIs because these articles are also linear with the purpose of the current study. These 37 articles were published between 2018 and 2023. All of them were from empirical research papers from the discipline of applied linguistics.

Data Analysis Procedures

An analytical framework to analyze rhetorical strategies for incremental research innovation

Incremental research innovation is one of the innovation types that improve or increase the existing knowledge found in the literature for the present research (Rubin & Abramson, 2018). In this regard, authors may either fill a research gap, add the existing knowledge, or modify earlier studies found in the literature. More details about incremental innovation concepts are described further in the theoretical framework in Figure 1.

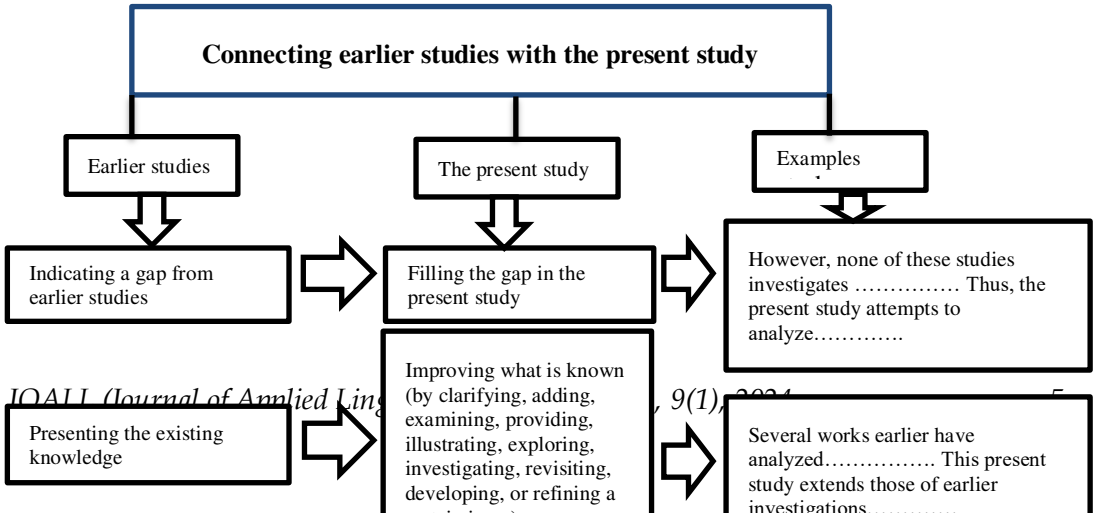

Figure 1. The rhetorical strategies in incremental research innovation

These three rhetorical strategies are possibly parts of occupying the niche in the CARS model (Swales, 1990, 2004), but they have not been explicitly included in the model. This move is about how research article authors respond to the weaknesses of earlier literature, either foregrounding the insufficiency of previous research (Arianto & Basthomi, 2021; Arianto et al., 2021; Suryani et al., 2015) or presenting the inadequate and inconsistent previous research (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023). These ways of authors' responses are the primary purpose of this study.

The framework above was employed to analyze rhetorical strategies used by RA authors to realize their incremental innovation. The first strategy is by indicating a gap (Arianto & Basthomi, 2021; Arianto et al., 2021; Arsyad & Zainil, 2023; Robinson et al., 2011; Suryani et al., 2015; Swales, 1990), and then authors intend to fill the gap in their present research. The second strategy is to present the existing knowledge (Adnan, 2010; Arsyad, 2000; Swales, 1990), and then their present study intends to improve it with a particular focus. The third strategy is to present earlier studies (Adnan, 2010; Arsyad, 2000; Swales, 1990) and then attempt to modify them in their present study. This strategy is not likely to continue a tradition, but it intentionally modifies earlier studies. In this regard, after authors reviewed earlier studies, they then modified them in their current study. The purpose of employing this framework is to discover which strategies they employed to create incremental innovation in their present research.

An analytical framework to analyze linguistics features

For analyzing linguistic features, this study considered some earlier approaches for identifying linguistic features (Arianto et al., 2021; Arsyad & Zainil, 2023; Warsidi, 2022). The concept is presented in the following:

- **Connective adverbs**, in this regard, are adverbial adverbs that are usually located at the beginning of a sentence and function to connect

research with the present research, for example: **Based on our observations and investigation in this field**, we thus embarked…..., **In line with these goals**, this exploratory study examines…, **To address this research gap,**….., **Motivated by these considerations, the current study sets out,**…., **In this paper**,…….., **Taken the above**-described differences **into account**,…. etc.

- **Causative conjunction** functions to explain a reason for doing present research, such as This article, **therefore**, focuses on one of the core pragmatic skills in speaking…., **we thus** embarked on this study hoping to shed more light on…, **Therefore,** this study uses both sets…., etc.
- **Phrases denoting extending research** means a phrase indicating to improve research from the earlier research, such as: This study aims **to shed light on** this neglected area of research…., **We extend** this reflexivity here by exploring…, In this paper **we add another category**…., we thus embarked on **this study hoping to shed more light on**…., etc.
- **Phrases denoting examining particular topics**, in this regard, meaning that may test a particular issue from previous research, such as: One of the aims of this article **is to clarify** the nature…, this exploratory study **examines**….., One aim of our study **is to explore whether**…, The goal of the present study was to use the same approach **to test whether**…, etc.
- **Phrases denoting contribution**, in this context, are used to promote that authors' current research contains a contribution to knowledge development, such as: the present study **provides an account** …, **The** current study seeks **to contribute** to the burgeoning research interest…., **our desire to contribute**……, etc.
- **Phrases denoting modification**, in this study, are employed to show journals' gatekeepers that the current research has modification as innovation, such as: such drawbacks **are remedied** by testing a cohort.., we instead **combine techniques**…, corpus-based tasks were **designed**…., etc.

The above framework was used to analyze linguistic features that authors use to create incremental research innovation. All the above examples were taken from the present research data. By employing this framework, the analysis was quickly conducted, and the results may become reliable and accountable.

FINDINGS

Rhetorical Strategies to Create Incremental Research Innovation

After data analysis had been thoroughly carried out, the results showed three rhetorical strategies employed in the data of the present study. They are

Strategy 1: Indicating gaps – and then- filling the gaps, Strategy 2: Presenting the existing knowledge – and then – improving on what is known, and Strategy 3: Presenting earlier studies – and then - modifying them in the present study. However, Strategy 2 is the most employed in the present study because it received 54,05% of the total data. More details about the strategies to create incremental innovation found in the present study are presented in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1. The summary findings of rhetorical strategies to create incremental innovation in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals

Rhetorical strategies to create incremental innovation	Numbers	Per cent
Strategy 1: Indicating gaps – and then- filling the gaps in the present study	13	35.14%
Strategy 2: Presenting the existing knowledge – and then – improving what is known	20	54.05%
Strategy 3: Presenting earlier studies – and then - modifying them in the present study	4	10.81%
Total numbers	**37**	**100%**

As presented in Table 1, Strategy 2 is the most employed in the data of the present study, followed by Strategy 1 and Strategy 3 (respectively). For more details about these findings, Figure 2 also describes the findings in different ways.

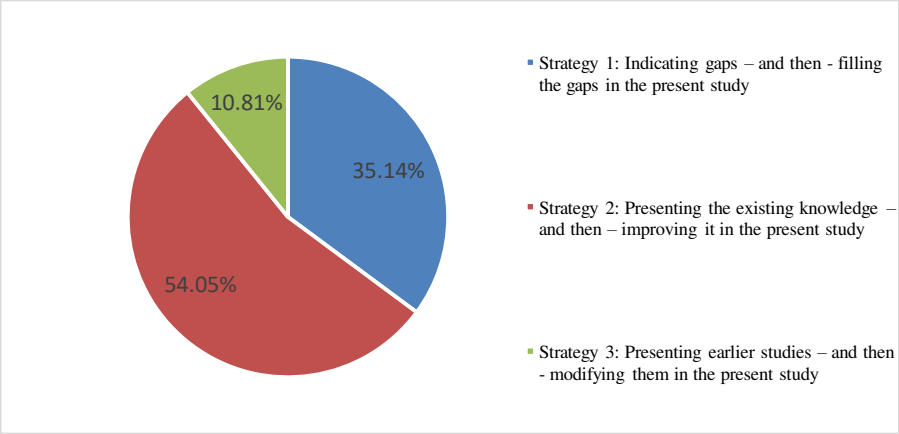

Figure 2. Summary findings of rhetorical strategies to create incremental innovation in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals

As shown in Figure 2, the highest percentage number is orange, and then followed by blue and green colours. These appearances indicate that Strategy 2 (Presenting the existing knowledge and then improving it to what is known in the present study) has the highest number of employments in the present study. Then, Strategy 1 (Indicating gaps – and then- filling the gaps in the present study) is in the second position. Last, Strategy 3 (Presenting earlier studies -and then- modifying them in the present study) has the fewest number of employment. The ways authors employed these three rhetorical strategies are exemplified and described as follows:

Strategy 1: Indicating gaps –and then- filling the gaps in the present study
This strategy is employed by indicating a research gap found in the literature, and then authors intend to fill the gap for their present research. In this regard, the author intends to fill the gap to incrementally innovate their present research. This strategy appears in 35,14% of the total data. The ways authors realize this strategy are exemplified as found in the data as follows:

Ex.1: While this topic frequently emerges in non-academic environments, as mentioned previously, ***its recent situation has rarely been explored*** *in academic writing. Based on our observations and investigation in this field,* ***we thus embarked on this study hoping*** *to shed more light on gender representation in academic journals in the social sciences, which generally deal with human subjects. 13*

Ex.2: In other words, ***the current knowledge of Japanese written discourse is not grounded in research on various written genres****. Given the reported difficulties for Japanese students in EAP settings (e.g., Bennett, 2018; McKinley, 2014) and* ***the lack of empirical knowledge on Japanese academic writing structures*** *from the perspective of genre, comparative research on the rhetorical structure of Japanese and English RAIs is long overdue.* ***This study aims to shed light on this neglected area of research****. This paper analyzes the rhetorical structures of RAIs in the discipline of Japanese literature (hereafter JL) published in English-language and Japanese-language journals. 21*

Ex.3: ***However, studying textbooks alone provides only partial insights into students' academic vocabulary exposure*** *through printed materials in EAP contexts since EAP provision typically draws on materials developed in-house (Jones & Durrant, 2010; Stoller, 2016)…….* ***There is, therefore, both a research gap and a practical need to examine*** *the extent to which printed EAP teaching materials developed in-house expose students to academic vocabulary, thus offering opportunities for incidental learning of academic vocabulary. In line with these goals,* ***this exploratory study examines the occurrence of general English academic words,……*** *25*

The above examples show that authors express research gaps found in literature, and then, as shown in underlined texts, authors intend to fill the gap in their present study. By doing so, the authors propose incremental innovation to fill the gap in their present research paper.

Strategy 2: Presenting the existing knowledge –and then– improving what is known
In employing this strategy, authors primarily present the existing knowledge found in literature, and then, they improve it in their present study by either clarifying, adding, extending, shedding light on, providing an account, exploring, contributing, setting out to examine, illustrating, developing, or attempting to revisit the existing knowledge. This strategy seems likely similar to the earlier strategy, but it seems stated more implicitly without showing any negative evaluation or judgments from the literature. This strategy receives the highest numbers of employment in the present study (54,05%). More details about the authors' ways of realizing this rhetorical strategy are exemplified as follows:

Ex.4: ***Ding's own work (Ding & Bruce, 2017) has taken a step in this direction*** *by focusing on the impact of neoliberalism on the roles and identities of EAP practitioners.* ***Similarly reflexive****, although taking a different perspective,* ***Hyland and Jiang (2021a) used bibliometric techniques to track changes*** *in EAP research and reveal the most influential topics, authors, and publications over the last 40 years.* ***We extend this reflexivity here by exploring*** ***the discourse of the field and the extent*** *to which topic foci influence the argument patterns and interactional preferences of writers. To do so, we take the main themes contained in the flagship publication of the field: The Journal of English for Academic Purposes. 12*

Ex.5: ***Given the value of exemplification in pedagogical and academic contexts, this paper aims to shed light on using this discourse function*** *in a corpus of research articles belonging to eight disciplines in the so-called soft and hard groups. The broad objectives of the study are to (1) describe the structural, semantic, and metadiscursive properties of examples, with a special focus on the nature of the units exemplified, the use of exemplifying markers, and the units used as exemplifying (2), explain the reasons behind opting for specific exemplification markers and exemplifying units, and (3) examine the extent to which the 'soft' versus 'hard' variables could mark the use of examples. 14*

Ex.6: ***Yet****, in terms of genre-based elements,* ***there are hardly any attempts to develop and directly implement*** *accessible and thorough instructional academic writing materials in curriculum and syllabus design, particularly in the case of RAs. As part of a larger study on the translation of the available genre-based RA writing literature into pedagogical materials and tasks and their implementation in an RA writing course,*

> ***the present study provides an account*** ***of genre-based revision strategies graduate students*** *in Applied Linguistics employed* ***to redraft*** *their RA-formatted term papers. 15*

The examples above, particularly the underlined texts, indicate that authors improve the existing knowledge as found in the literature. In this regard, they intend to extend, shed light on, and provide an account of a particular area of earlier research. In this way, they expect to propose a new insight for knowledge development.

Strategy 3: Presenting earlier studies – and then - modifying them in the present study

In realizing this strategy, authors first describe and review earlier literature, and then they modify a certain concept from the literature by either remedying, combining, or adopting the earlier concepts. Unfortunately, this strategy has the fewest employment in the present study because only four of 37 RAIs employ this strategy in their RAIs (10,81%). Here are the examples of Strategy 3 found in the present data:

> *Ex.7: These studies and heritage language acquisition investigations more generally,* ***however, are limited in that they seldom*** *include: (i) a comparison of at least one structure that is present and one absent from the dominant language; (ii) a group of proficiency-matched L2 speakers and appropriate control group; (iii) methodologies that avoid disadvantaging HLSs compared with monolinguals (Polinsky 2018; Polinsky and Scontras 2020).* ***In the present study, such drawbacks are remedied by testing a cohort of HLSs of Italian dominant in Swedish*** *who received substantially similar input during childhood from first-generation immigrant Italian parents. This group is then compared with proficiency-matched Swedish speakers of Italian on the production of five structures, four of which are absent and one present in Swedish.1 It is also the first study of HLSs to adopt a structural priming task…….. 09*

> *Ex.8:* ***Most previous studies using one of these techniques*** *for phraseological studies of language tend to generate a list of all the phraseological units (bundles or P-frames, respectively) in a corpus and then proceed to further analyze or classify these into, for example, functional categories.* ***In the present study, we instead combine techniques commonly applied*** *to single-word studies (where a small set of linguistic items are selected for further, detailed analysis) with a phraseological approach, focusing on a small set of phraseological units: in our case, high-frequency discontinuous sequences used for highlighting purposes. That is,* ***this project combines*** *a formulaic approach to analyzing highlighting strategies and a discourse-based perspective on the usage pattern of these discontinuous sequences…. 11*

As exemplified above, the underlined texts indicate that authors modify earlier studies to create incremental innovation in their present research paper. In ex.7, the author remedies issues of drawbacks. In ex.8, authors combine techniques for their present study. These two examples indicate that they modify a particular concept from earlier studies.

Linguistic Features to Create Incremental Research Innovation

After conducting data analysis concerning linguistic features, the results showed that the article authors in the present study used six linguistic features to create incremental research innovation. They are connective adverbs, causative conjunctions, phrases denoting extending research, phrases denoting examining a particular issue, phrases denoting examining a particular issue, and phrases denoting modification. More details about linguistic features used to create incremental innovation from the data analysis are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. The linguistic features to create incremental research innovation

No	Linguistic features	Examples	f	%
1	Connective adverbs	**To address this research gap,** this study examines how translanguaging is employed by the teacher (male) to create playful talk in the EMI classroom to accomplish his pedagogical goals in the lessons. 03	22	31,88%
2	Causative conjunction	This article, **therefore,** focuses on one of the core pragmatic skills in speaking, the expression of an epistemic stance. Despite the vital role of epistemic markers (EMs) in everyday communication (Biber et al. 1999; Ka¨rkka¨inen 2003; Bygate 2009),…. 05	5	7,25%
3	Phrases denoting extending research	**We extend this reflexivity** here by exploring the discourse of the field and the extent to which topic foci influence the argument patterns and interactional preferences of writers. To do so we take the main themes contained in the flagship publication of the field: The Journal	11	15,94%

No	Linguistic features	Examples	f	%
		of English for Academic Purposes. 12		
4	Phrases denoting examining a particular issue	The aim of this research is **to examine** which factors support the recognition of homonyms for children with EAL and EL1. 01	22	31,88%
5	Phrases denoting contribution	The current study seeks **to contribute** to the burgeoning research interest in correlating formulaic expressions and rhetorical functions by systematically examining the rhetorical functions of a particular type of formulaic language, that is, phrase-frames (Fletcher, 2011, hereafter p-frames), in a large corpus of social science research article (RA) introductions. 22	4	5,80%
6	Phrases denoting modification	**In the present study, we instead combine techniques commonly applied** to single-word studies (where a small set of linguistic items are selected for further, detailed analysis) with a phraseological approach, focusing on a small set of phraseological units: in our case, high-frequency discontinuous sequences used for highlighting purposes. 11	5	7,25%
	Total Numbers		**69**	**100%**

Table 2 above shows that of the six linguistic features, connective adverbs and phrases denoting examining a particular issue have the highest number of appearances to create incremental research innovation (as both of them have 31,88% of appearances), while the other four features have lower numbers of appearances. This finding indicates that in creating incremental innovations, authors favoured using connective adverbs and phrases denoting examining a particular issue.

In summary, after analyzing and reporting the analysis results, this study finally revealed that the authors in the present study employed three

rhetorical strategies in proposing incremental innovation within their RAIs. However, Strategy 2 (Presenting the existing knowledge – and then – improving what is known) is the most favoured strategy to propose incremental innovation. In addition, they tend to use two types of connective features, connective adverbs and phrases denoting examining a particular issue, to create their incremental innovation.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study show three rhetorical strategies to create incremental innovations in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals. However, of these three rhetorical strategies, surprisingly, Strategy 2, Presenting the existing knowledge – and then – improving on what is known, is the most dominant strategy used by authors in the present study. The reason may be that showing earlier knowledge findings and then improving them in the present study may become more realistic and achievable for authors to create innovation in their present research. Another reason may be that this strategy is considered more polite than criticizing insufficient information from previous research, such as biased information, inconsistency, and not the right information to indicate a research gap (Robinson et al., 2011). This strategy seems to be similar to the CARS model regarding continuing traditions (Swales, 1990) and adding to what is known (Swales, 2004).

In realizing this strategy, authors may employ some possible strategies, such as taking literature into account, presenting contradictory previous research findings, or taking earlier studies into consideration. After that, they may intend to add earlier knowledge, extend previous findings, shed light on previous knowledge claims, provide an account, contribute to the earlier studies, attempt to refine knowledge, etc. This strategy, in a shortcut, seems similar to indicating a research gap, but it tends to be more politely presented because the authors were not conveying or judging the weaknesses directly. They tend to present this strategy implicitly. For example, they prefer to say, "**In this paper, we aim to test recent proposals for refining the complexity construct** for the purposes of studying L2 productions" (Lahmann et al., 2019, p. 174). This finding implies that conveying the weaknesses of previous research findings politely is considered important and most commonly employed by article authors of reputable applied linguistics journals. In this regard, they may convey it implicitly. Compared to earlier studies, the present findings seem similar to earlier studies that authors of RAIs tend to foreground insufficient information from previous research, such as presenting insufficiency of previous research (Arianto & Basthomi, 2021; Arianto et al., 2021; Suryani et al., 2015), and inadequate and inconsistent previous research (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023). In response to this insufficient

information, the present findings showed implicitly by adding earlier knowledge, extending previous findings, shedding light on previous knowledge claims, providing an account, contributing to the earlier studies, and attempting to refine knowledge. In contrast, these earlier studies have not been explicitly described authors' responses to their literature.

Concerning linguistic features to realize incremental innovation, the authors employed six types of linguistic features. However, two types appeared to be the most dominant in the present study: connective adverbs and phrases denoting examining a particular issue. Regarding the use of connective adverbs, the reason may be that authors want to connect ideas from earlier texts and contexts with the present study and to show the relationship between the literature and the present study. Besides, they may also intend to show readabilities and coherence between earlier literature and the present study because this feature is easy and simple to create a connection (Yanti, 2019) and important to make text cohesion (Janulienė & Dziedravičius, 2015). This finding implies that connective adverbs play important roles in creating linearity, cohesion, and relationship between literature and the present study to create incremental research innovation. Besides, phrases denoting examining a particular issue also play important roles in the present data. The purpose may be to create a focused discussion to respond to earlier literature for further content research. This finding is inconsistent with those indicating research gap that adversative conjunction is the most dominant feature to realize a research gap (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023). However, this study cannot overgeneralize these two findings because the context of the study is different between them. In this regard, while the present study investigates the authors' responses to their literature, Arsyad and Zainil (2023) analyzed linguistic features in realizing a research gap. Thus, the results, of course, may differ between them.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data of the present study, the results finally conclude two significant findings. Firstly, article authors in reputable applied linguistics journals employed three different rhetorical strategies to innovate their present research: Strategy 1 (Indicating gaps – and then- filling the gaps), Strategy 2 (Presenting the existing knowledge – and then – improving what is known), and Strategy 3 (Presenting earlier studies – and then - modifying them in the present study). However, Strategy 2 is the most dominantly employed by article authors. Then, they employed six different linguistic features to realize incremental innovation for their research, but only two of them (connective adverbs and phrases denoting examining a particular issue) are the most dominant in the present study.

In addressing these findings, this study theoretically may contribute to adding some insights to the literature that to address incremental innovation in research; article authors need communicative strategies. Besides, it can practically be used to design teaching materials for training academic writing to create innovation in research. However, although this study has these two kinds of significance, it also has limitations. It only focuses its investigation on rhetorical strategies and linguistic features to create innovation but ignores other communicative strategies to convince journal gatekeepers. Also, the corpus numbers are limited, and thus, it cannot capture various linguistic elements. For these rationales, this study also recommends these uncovered issues for further studies. Besides, other disciplinary articles and scopes are also very welcome for further investigation.

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