

Interpretive Strategies in Discussions Section of Research Article: Evidence from High-Impact Linguistics Journals

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ABSTRACT

The discussion section is widely recognized as the argumentative core of a research article, where researchers interpret, compare, and justify their findings logically and scientifically. Despite the fact that previous studies have explored the rhetorical organization of research articles, limited attention has been paid to the argumentative strategies employed in discussion sections of high-impact linguistics journals. This study scrutinizes how researchers construct arguments in the discussion sections of 30 empirical articles published in Scopus-indexed Q1 linguistics journals between 2021 and 2024. Using qualitative content analysis, the study examines the strategies used to interpret findings, compare findings with previous studies, and justify research claims. The findings reveal that opinion-based interpretation is the dominant strategy for interpreting findings, while comparison with previous studies is the most frequently employed strategy for establishing relationships between findings. In addition, supporting claims with prior research emerges as the predominant strategy for justifying findings. This study contributes to the field of academic discourse analysis by providing an updated understanding of argumentative practices in contemporary Q1 linguistics journals and offers practical guidance for novice researchers seeking publication in internationally indexed journals.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Significance

At the core of academic knowledge construction lies argumentation. In research articles, argumentation is most explicitly realized in the discussion section, where empirical findings are transformed into disciplinary claims through interpretation, positioning, and justification. The discussion thus functions not merely as a structural component of the research article but as its primary site of epistemic negotiation (Flowerdew, 2013), (Gross, 1990). Unlike descriptive sections such as Method or Results, which foreground procedural transparency and empirical reporting, the discussion requires rhetorical sophistication: authors must construct meaning, manage epistemic commitment, and articulate the significance of their findings within an ongoing scholarly conversation (Dudley-Evans, 2001), (Mur-Dueñas, 2018). It is here that research moves from reporting data to claiming knowledge.

Although genre-based research has established the importance of rhetorical organization in research article discussions, macro-move analysis provides only a partial account of how argumentative functions are realized in actual texts (Yang & Allison, 2003). Two discussion sections may display similar or even identical move structures yet differ substantially in persuasive force and epistemic authority. The presence of communicative moves alone does not necessarily guarantee argumentative effectiveness, as rhetorical variation may emerge through differences in positioning, stance, and evidential framing (Hyland, 2000), (Hyland, 2005), (Parkinson, 2020), (Swales, 1990). Consequently, structural taxonomies alone cannot fully explain how persuasive meaning is constructed at the sentence and paragraph levels in expert academic writing (Bhatia, 1993). This limitation is particularly important because academic persuasion involves multiple interconnected dimensions. Research on stance, metadiscourse, authorial presence, citation, and argumentation has demonstrated that writers

negotiate epistemic commitment, construct authorial identity, position their findings in relation to previous scholarship, and establish the credibility of their claims (Hyland, 2005), (Hyland, 2005), (Hyland & Tse, 2004), (Hyland, 2015), (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2018), (Mur-Dueñas, 2018), (Jiang, 2021). Nevertheless, these perspectives have largely addressed different aspects of academic discourse, leaving insufficient understanding of how interpretative reasoning, contrastive positioning, and evidential validation converge within discussion sections. In particular, the micro-mechanisms through which authors construct interpretative authority, differentiate their findings from prior scholarship, and secure disciplinary legitimacy have not been systematically examined within an integrated framework, especially in contemporary high-impact publishing contexts (Hyland & Jiang, 2019), (Pérez-Llantada, 2023).

To address this gap, the present study investigates discussion sections from Scopus-indexed Q1 linguistics journals to identify recurrent patterns of interpretative, comparative, and justificatory realization. Building upon macro-move theory while extending it through systematic micro-rhetorical analysis, the study examines how argumentative functions are enacted at the textual level and how these strategies contribute to the construction of persuasive force. By integrating structural organization with micro-level rhetorical analysis, this study seeks to move beyond descriptive genre taxonomies toward an explanatory account of how empirical findings are transformed into persuasive disciplinary contributions. In doing so, it advances genre theory by bridging macro-structural stability and micro-rhetorical enactment within the research article discussion.

1.2. Literature Review

At the core of academic knowledge construction lies argumentation. In research articles, argumentation is most explicitly realized in the discussion section, where empirical findings are transformed into disciplinary claims through interpretation, positioning, and justification. The

discussion thus functions not merely as a structural component of the research article but as its primary site of epistemic negotiation (Flowerdew, 2013), (Gross, 1990). Unlike descriptive sections such as Method or Results, which foreground procedural transparency and empirical reporting, the discussion requires rhetorical sophistication: authors must construct meaning, manage epistemic commitment, and articulate the significance of their findings within an ongoing scholarly conversation (Dudley-Evans, 2001). It is here that research moves from reporting data to claiming knowledge.

Genre-based research in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has provided foundational insight into the organizational regularities of research articles. Early analyses demonstrated that discussion sections integrate reporting, interpretation, and evaluation within recognizable rhetorical frameworks (Yang & Allison, 2003). Swales' genre theory conceptualized research writing as socially situated communicative action governed by disciplinary norms and expectations (Swales, 1990). Building on this tradition, Yang and Allison (Yang & Allison, 2003) proposed a detailed move-step model of discussion sections, identifying recurrent functions such as reporting results, commenting on findings, comparing with prior research, and articulating implications. Subsequent cross-disciplinary applications have confirmed the relative stability and explanatory strength of these macro-structural configurations (Brett, 1994), (Holmes, 1997). Collectively, this body of work has established move analysis as a robust framework for describing genre organization.

However, while macro-move analysis captures structural regularities, it offers limited insight into how rhetorical functions are enacted at the sentence and paragraph levels. Two discussion sections may display identical move structures yet differ significantly in persuasive force or epistemic authority. Variation in move realization has been linked to differences in rhetorical competence and disciplinary expectations (Hyland, 2000), and the mere presence of

communicative moves does not guarantee argumentative effectiveness (Hyland, 2005). These limitations suggest that structural taxonomies alone cannot fully account for how persuasive meaning is constructed in expert academic writing (Bhatia, 1993).

Parallel developments in stance and metadiscourse research have shifted attention toward the interactional dimension of academic discourse. Hyland's work on hedging, boosters, engagement markers, and authorial identity demonstrates how writers strategically negotiate commitment and align with disciplinary readers (Hyland, 2005), (Hyland & Tse, 2004), (Hyland, 2002), (Hyland, 2015). Such studies highlight the interpersonal and evaluative resources underpinning persuasion, revealing that argumentative strength depends not only on structural organization but also on epistemic positioning within the discourse community (Hyland, 1996). Toulmin's model of argumentation further underscores the importance of warrants and backing in legitimizing claims (Toulmin, 1958). Nevertheless, much of this research isolates specific linguistic features rather than examining how interpretative reasoning, contrastive positioning, and evidential validation operate in patterned interaction within a particular genre section (Martin & Rose, 2007).

A micro-rhetorical perspective addresses this limitation by examining patterned strategies through which writers realize interpretation, comparison, and justification at the textual level (Paltridge, 2012). Rather than treating moves as abstract structural units or linguistic markers as isolated devices, this perspective conceptualizes rhetorical construction as a layered process in which reasoning, intertextual positioning, and evidential support interact to transform empirical findings into persuasive contributions. Although previous studies have hinted at such dynamics, few have empirically mapped how these strategies operate sequentially and cumulatively within discussion sections of high-impact international journals.

1.3. Research Gap in Current Studies

Consequently, despite substantial advances in move analysis, stance theory, and citation studies, the field remains analytically fragmented. Move analysis explains functional organization, stance research explains interpersonal negotiation, and citation studies explain intertextual alignment. Yet what remains under-theorized is how these dimensions converge within discussion sections to produce progressive argumentative intensification. In particular, the micro-mechanisms through which authors construct interpretative authority, differentiate their findings from prior scholarship, and secure disciplinary legitimacy have not been systematically modeled in an integrated framework.

Building upon macro-move theory while extending it through systematic micro-rhetorical analysis, the present study investigates discussion sections from Scopus-indexed Q1 linguistics journals to identify recurrent patterns of interpretative, comparative, and justificatory realization. By integrating structural organization with micro-level rhetorical sequencing, this study seeks to move beyond descriptive genre taxonomies toward an explanatory account of how persuasive force is progressively constructed in expert academic writing. In doing so, it advances genre theory by bridging macro-structural stability and micro-rhetorical enactment within the research article discussion.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis design. While the primary objective was interpretive, the coding was intended to increase transparency, methodological robustness, and replicability in identifying patterned rhetorical tendencies across the corpus (Bhatia, 1993), (Paltridge, 2012). The analysis focuses specifically on micro-rhetorical strategies realized within the discussion sections of high-impact international linguistics journals, examining how argumentative functions are enacted at the textual level.

The qualitative content analysis design was selected because the study seeks to identify and

interpret recurring rhetorical strategies within their textual and argumentative contexts rather than merely quantify the occurrence of linguistic features. This approach allows the analysis to capture the functional realization of interpretation, comparison, and justification while maintaining systematic procedures for identifying and categorizing patterns across the corpus. The use of coding further provides a structured basis for examining recurrent rhetorical tendencies and relating their qualitative interpretation to their distribution across the selected research articles. The research was implemented through five systematically organized phases: (1) corpus identification and selection, (2) macro-structural move coding, (3) development and operationalization of micro-rhetorical coding categories, (4) reliability testing, and (5) quantitative distributional analysis. This phased procedure ensured both interpretive depth and empirical accountability in examining the construction of academic argumentation within expert scholarly writing (Martin & Rose, 2007).

2.1 Corpus and Sampling Procedures

The corpus comprised 30 full-length empirical research articles published between 2021 and 2024 in Scopus-indexed Q1 linguistics journals. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the dataset represented expert-level disciplinary discourse and high-impact publication standards, consistent with established genre-analytic research design (Bhatia, 1993), (Paltridge, 2012). By restricting selection to Q1 outlets, the study targeted texts exemplifying advanced rhetorical sophistication and stabilized scholarly conventions within contemporary international publication contexts. The corpus selection followed predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure functional comparability and analytical consistency across the selected texts. Articles were included when they met all of the following criteria: (1) they were full-length empirical research articles; (2) they reported original empirical data; (3) they were published in Scopus-indexed Q1 linguistics journals; (4) they were published between 2021 and 2024; (5) they

contained a clearly identifiable discussion component; and (6) the discussion section provided sufficient textual material for examining micro-rhetorical realization. These criteria were established because the study specifically investigates how argumentative functions are realized within discussions of empirical research articles rather than across different research genres or article types.

To maintain functional comparability across texts, discussion sections were identified using explicit section labels, including “Discussion,” “Results and Discussion,” and “Discussion and Implications.” Articles were excluded when they were conceptual or theoretical papers, literature reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, short communications, research notes, editorials, book reviews, or other non-empirical publications. Articles were also excluded when they did not report original empirical data, did not meet the specified Scopus Q1 classification and publication-period criteria, or lacked a clearly identifiable discussion section suitable for micro-rhetorical analysis. These exclusions were necessary because such publications differ in communicative purpose, evidential structure, and rhetorical organization and therefore would not provide sufficiently comparable discussion realizations. The selection was further bounded by the 2021-2024 publication period to capture

contemporary rhetorical practices in research writing and to minimize the influence of potentially changing disciplinary and publishing conventions over longer periods. The final corpus consisted of 30 articles distributed across five linguistics subfields: Applied Linguistics (10), Discourse Analysis (6), Pragmatics (5), Second Language Acquisition (5), and Bilingualism (4). By applying the same eligibility criteria across the selected texts, the sampling procedure provided a functionally comparable corpus for systematic analysis of interpretation, comparison, and justification strategies.

The study used Scopus indexing and Q1 journal classification as the principal criteria for identifying eligible publication venues. Web of Science and ScienceDirect were not used as independent eligibility criteria because the study was specifically designed to examine articles published in Scopus-indexed Q1 linguistics journals. This database boundary ensured consistency between the stated research objective, corpus selection, and the definition of high-impact linguistics journals adopted in the study. The final corpus therefore comprised 30 empirical articles that satisfied all predefined inclusion criteria and were considered suitable for the subsequent macro-move and micro-rhetorical analyses.

Table 1. Corpus Distribution by Year and Subfield

Variable	Value	Number of Articles
Publication Year	2021	8
	2022	7
	2023	9
	2024	6
Subfield	Applied Linguistics	10
	Discourse Analysis	6
	Pragmatics	5
	Second Language Acquisition	5

	Bilingualism	4
Total		30

The proportion of selected articles relative to the total number of eligible publications within the targeted journals supports adequate representation of recent rhetorical practices. Given the focus on expert writing in high-impact outlets, the sample may be considered analytically representative of contemporary disciplinary discourse within international linguistics scholarship.

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

Following the selection of the final corpus, data collection focused on extracting and preparing the discussion sections of the 30 included empirical research articles for analysis. First, the full texts of the selected articles were obtained and examined to locate the discussion component. Discussion sections were identified according to their explicit functional headings, including “Discussion,” “Results and Discussion,” and “Discussion and Implications.” Only the portions of the articles serving the discussion function were extracted as the primary textual data.

Second, the extracted discussion sections were reviewed to ensure that they contained the relevant argumentative content required for the analysis. The texts were then segmented into analytical units at the sentence and paragraph levels. Segmentation was undertaken to facilitate the identification of individual rhetorical functions and micro-rhetorical strategies while preserving their surrounding textual context. The resulting analytical units constituted the dataset for subsequent macro-move and micro-rhetorical coding.

Third, the extracted and segmented data were organized according to article, publication year, and subfield to maintain traceability throughout the analytical process. The same extraction and segmentation procedures were applied consistently across all 30 articles to ensure comparability of the textual data. The prepared

dataset was subsequently subjected to macro-structural move analysis and micro-rhetorical coding as described in Section 3.4. As the study relied exclusively on publicly accessible published articles and did not involve human participants, formal ethical approval was not required. All sources were documented and cited in accordance with established scholarly and publication standards.

2.3 Analytical Instrument and Coding Framework

The analytical instrument comprised two complementary components. First, a macro-move analytical framework adapted from Yang and Allison (Yang & Allison, 2003) was employed to identify structural rhetorical functions within the discussion sections, including reporting results, commenting on findings, comparing with prior literature, and articulating implications. This framework established the structural baseline for mapping genre organization and functional distribution.

Second, an inductively developed micro-rhetorical coding scheme was constructed to categorize patterned strategies of (1) interpretation, (2) comparison, and (3) justification at the sentence and paragraph levels. Whereas macro-move analysis captures functional presence, the micro-rhetorical scheme examines how argumentative meaning is enacted through authorial reasoning, intertextual positioning, and evidential warranting.

The coding categories were refined through iterative cycles of close reading and constant comparison to ensure definitional clarity, analytical consistency, and internal coherence across rhetorical functions.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two complementary stages: qualitative interpretation and quantitative distributional analysis. First, the

coded analytical units were examined qualitatively to determine how rhetorical functions and micro-rhetorical strategies were realized within their textual contexts. The analysis focused on identifying the functional characteristics of interpretation, comparison, and justification and on examining how these strategies contributed to the construction of argumentative meaning.

Second, the coded data were subjected to descriptive quantitative analysis to determine the distribution and relative prominence of the identified rhetorical strategies. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the macro-rhetorical moves and for each micro-rhetorical category. The frequency distributions were used to identify dominant strategies within interpretation, comparison, and justification and to facilitate systematic comparison across the corpus.

For the comparison strategies, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test was additionally applied to determine whether the observed distribution across difference-based comparison, similarity-based comparison, and argumentative opposition differed significantly from an equal distribution. The analysis yielded $\chi^2(2, N = 138) = 12.84, p < .01$, indicating statistically significant variation among the three comparison strategies.

Finally, the quantitative distributional patterns were interpreted in relation to the qualitative analysis to identify broader argumentative tendencies across the discussion sections. Particular attention was given to the relationship between macro-structural moves and micro-

rhetorical strategies, enabling the study to examine how interpretation, comparison, and justification collectively contribute to the construction and intensification of academic argumentation.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the coding framework was established through expert evaluation involving two senior scholars in applied linguistics and genre analysis. The reviewers assessed the operational definitions, category boundaries, and conceptual distinctions among the micro-rhetorical constructs, providing detailed feedback to enhance definitional precision, analytical scope, and construct clarity. To ensure coding reliability, 30% of the corpus was independently coded by a second trained analyst. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, yielding $\kappa = 0.81$, indicating substantial agreement and meeting established reliability benchmarks for qualitative discourse analysis (Martin & Rose, 2007), (Paltridge, 2012). This result supports the stability and reproducibility of the coding procedures. Additionally, internal consistency across rhetorical categories was systematically examined to ensure classificatory coherence and functional distinctiveness among interpretation, comparison, and justification strategies. The research procedure followed a systematic, multi-stage design to ensure analytical rigor and replicability (Martin & Rose, 2007), (Paltridge, 2012). The sequential phases of the study are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Sequential Stages of Research

Stage	Research Activity	Purpose
1	Identification of eligible Q1 journals	Ensure corpus credibility and high publication standards
2	Screening of empirical articles (2021–2024)	Control temporal scope and article type
3	Extraction of discussion sections	Isolate analytical unit
4	Application of macro-move analysis	Establish structural rhetorical framework

5	Development of micro-rhetorical coding categories	Operationalize analytical constructs
6	Reliability testing using Cohen's Kappa	Ensure coding consistency and objectivity
7	Categorization of dominant rhetorical strategies	Identify distributional patterns
8	Interpretation of argumentative patterns	Synthesize findings and construct theoretical implications

3. Results

The analysis of the 30 discussion sections identified recurring macro- and micro-rhetorical patterns in the construction of academic argumentation. The results are presented in a sequential manner, beginning with the distribution of micro-rhetorical strategies used to interpret research findings, followed by strategies employed to compare findings with previous scholarship and to justify research claims. This organization reflects the analytical framework established in the methodology and enables the relative prominence of interpretation, comparison, and justification strategies to be examined systematically. The findings are subsequently integrated to identify the broader rhetorical progression through which empirical findings are transformed into interpretative

claims, differentiated from prior scholarship, and reinforced through disciplinary validation.

3.1 Micro-Rhetorical Strategies in Interpreting Findings

Out of 428 identified rhetorical segments, 162 instances (37.9%) were classified as interpretative in function, indicating that interpretation constitutes the most substantial argumentative activity within the discussion sections. This distribution further supports the structural centrality of Move 2 identified at the macro level. Close qualitative coding revealed four recurrent micro-rhetorical strategies through which interpretation is enacted, suggesting that interpretative work is not monolithic but rhetorically diversified at the sentence and paragraph levels.

Table 3. Interpretation Strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage within Interpretation (%)
Writer's Own Opinion	72	44.4
Reference to Theory	48	29.6
Reference to Previous Research	26	16
Illustration / Example	16	9.8

Table 4 indicates that interpretation is most frequently enacted through writer-driven analytical reasoning (44.4%). This predominance

suggests that expert authors tend to construct meaning through inferential elaboration rather than relying exclusively on external authorities. In

high-impact journal writing, epistemic credibility appears to derive not simply from citation density but from the capacity to analytically interpret and extend empirical findings. The second most frequent strategy, reference to theory (29.6%), functions as a form of conceptual anchoring. By situating interpretations within established theoretical frameworks, authors reinforce analytical coherence and signal disciplinary alignment. References to previous empirical research (16%) position interpretations within ongoing scholarly conversations, while illustrative examples (9.8%) enhance explanatory transparency by concretizing abstract claims. Taken together, these patterns suggest that interpretative discourse in high-impact journals is

not characterized by passive citation or mechanical literature alignment. Rather, it reflects an active and layered construction of meaning in which authorial inference, theoretical framing, intertextual positioning, and empirical illustration operate in coordinated interaction.

3.2 Strategies of Comparing Findings

Comparison functions account for 138 segments, representing 32.2% of the total rhetorical units, highlighting their significant role in positioning research within the disciplinary landscape. Three distinct comparison strategies were identified, as summarized in Table 5.

Table 4. Comparison Strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage within Comparison (%)
Difference-Based Comparison	68	49.3
Similarity-Based Comparison	42	30.4
Argumentative Opposition	28	20.3

Difference-based comparison emerges as the dominant strategy (49.3%). Statistical analysis indicates that this distribution is unlikely to be attributable to chance; chi-square testing shows significant variation across strategies ($\chi^2(2, N = 138) = 12.84, p < .01$). This pattern suggests that expert authors tend to prioritize differentiation as a principal mechanism for constructing novelty and disciplinary value. Rather than solely demonstrating alignment with prior scholarship, writers frequently foreground contextual, methodological, or conceptual divergence to position their studies as substantive contributions to the field. The prominence of contrastive positioning supports the view that innovation in

high-impact journals is discursively constructed. Novelty does not simply reside in new findings; it is articulated through calibrated differentiation, where controlled contrast functions as a persuasive resource for establishing contribution within an existing body of research.

3.3 Strategies of Justifying Findings

Justification functions account for 128 segments, representing 29.9% of the total rhetorical units, suggesting that nearly one-third of discussion discourse is allocated to warranting and legitimating claims. Three distinct justification strategies were identified, as summarized in Table 6.

Table 5. Justification Strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage within Justification (%)
Supporting with Previous Research	55	43
Logical Reasoning	41	32
Theoretical Support	32	25

The most prominent strategy is justification through reference to previous empirical research (43%). This pattern suggests that authors tend to legitimize their claims by situating them within an existing evidentiary network. By demonstrating alignment with established findings, writers strengthen the perceived credibility and disciplinary acceptability of their interpretations. In contrast to interpretation, where authorial reasoning predominates, justification relies more extensively on intertextual validation. Logical reasoning (32%) functions as a form of internal warranting, linking claims to methodological or analytical coherence, while theoretical support (25%) provides conceptual grounding within established frameworks. Taken together, these findings suggest a dual rhetorical architecture underpinning discussion writing: interpretation foregrounds authorial epistemic authority, whereas justification foregrounds disciplinary legitimacy. Persuasive force may therefore arise from the dynamic interplay between individual analytical ownership and collective scholarly validation.

This progression suggests that persuasive writing in high-impact linguistics journals is not achieved through the mere presence of conventional moves. Instead, argumentative force appears to develop through a layered process of rhetorical intensification, in which interpretation, differentiation, and validation are sequentially and interactively coordinated. Persuasiveness

3.4 Integrated Rhetorical Pattern

The findings point to a coherent and recurrent argumentative progression within the discussion sections analyzed. Rather than functioning as discrete rhetorical units, moves and micro-strategies appear to operate in a patterned sequence:

1. Findings are reintroduced (Move 1), establishing the empirical grounding of the claim.
2. Results are analytically elaborated through authorial reasoning (Move 2), transforming data into interpretative claims.
3. Interpretations are strategically differentiated from prior scholarship, predominantly through difference-based comparison, thereby articulating novelty.
4. Claims are subsequently reinforced through empirical citation, contributing to disciplinary validation

thus resides in the systematic integration of micro-rhetorical enactment within a relatively stable macro-structural framework.

4. Discussion

The findings affirm the structural stability of the discussion genre across high-impact linguistics journals, while also revealing that rhetorical

functions do not carry equal argumentative weight. The identification of all seven moves proposed by Yang and Allison (Yang & Allison, 2003) reinforces the usefulness of macro-move analysis for describing the organizational structure of discussion sections. However, the prominence of commenting on results indicates that interpretation occupies a particularly central position in transforming empirical observations into disciplinary knowledge. This finding is consistent with the view that discussion sections function not simply as extensions of results reporting but as sites where researchers construct meaning, negotiate epistemic positions, and establish the significance of their findings (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995), (Yang & Allison, 2003). Thus, macro-structural organization provides an important rhetorical framework, but the argumentative value of a discussion section depends substantially on how these structural functions are enacted at the textual level. The micro-rhetorical findings further suggest that interpretation is principally constructed through authorial analytical reasoning. This pattern indicates that expert academic writers do not rely exclusively on previous literature to establish the meaning of their findings. Instead, they first exercise interpretative agency by developing an analytical account of what the findings mean and why they matter. This observation extends research on stance and authorial positioning, which emphasizes that academic writers must negotiate commitment while simultaneously establishing an authoritative scholarly voice (Hyland, 2005), (Hyland, 2002), (Hyland, 2005), (Hyland & Tse, 2004). The subsequent use of theoretical references and previous research can therefore be understood as supporting rather than replacing the author's analytical interpretation. Interpretation consequently represents an important site of epistemic positioning in which writers establish intellectual ownership while maintaining alignment with disciplinary knowledge.

The comparison findings provide further insight into how scholarly novelty is constructed. Rather than presenting research contributions primarily

through direct opposition to previous scholarship, authors tend to establish distinction through controlled differentiation. Such differentiation may involve identifying contextual, methodological, or conceptual differences while maintaining a relationship with established scholarship. This pattern supports research on novelty construction and research article discussions, which suggests that academic contributions are commonly negotiated through positioning within an existing research space (Jiang, 2021), (Jiang & Hyland, 2020). From this perspective, novelty is not necessarily constructed by rejecting previous research; rather, it can emerge through extending, refining, qualifying, or repositioning existing knowledge. Comparison therefore performs an important argumentative function by simultaneously maintaining scholarly continuity and creating space for the contribution of the current study. The justification findings demonstrate a complementary relationship between authorial reasoning and intertextual support. Whereas interpretation allows writers to develop an analytical account of their findings, justification provides additional disciplinary grounding for the claims being advanced. The reliance on previous empirical research suggests that claims gain legitimacy when they are connected to an established evidentiary network. This observation is consistent with research on citation and intertextual positioning, which emphasizes the role of previous scholarship in establishing credibility and situating new claims within disciplinary conversations (Mur-Dueñas, 2018). At the same time, logical reasoning and theoretical support indicate that justification is not reducible to citation practices alone. Claims are strengthened through the interaction of empirical evidence, analytical coherence, and theoretical grounding, reflecting the importance of warrants and backing in academic argumentation (Toulmin, 1958).

Taken together, the findings point to an integrated rhetorical process in which interpretation, comparison, and justification perform complementary rather than isolated

functions. Interpretation establishes an analytical account of the findings, comparison positions that account in relation to existing scholarship, and justification strengthens its disciplinary legitimacy. This relationship provides a more nuanced understanding of argumentative construction than a purely structural account of discussion sections. The findings therefore support the view that persuasive academic writing develops through the interaction of macro-structural organization and micro-rhetorical realization. In this process, authors negotiate a balance between intellectual ownership and disciplinary alignment, allowing empirical findings to be transformed into claims that are both distinctive and recognizable within the discourse community.

Accordingly, the study contributes to genre theory by demonstrating the value of examining not only which rhetorical moves occur but also how those moves are realized through patterned micro-rhetorical strategies. The findings suggest that structural compliance alone is insufficient to explain argumentative effectiveness. Instead, persuasive force emerges through the coordinated enactment of interpretation, differentiation, and justification, through which epistemic authority and disciplinary legitimacy are constructed together (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995), (Yang & Allison, 2003). This perspective extends conventional move analysis by highlighting the rhetorical mechanisms through which macro-structural functions acquire argumentative force in contemporary high-impact linguistics writing.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how academic arguments are constructed in the discussion sections of high-impact linguistics journals by integrating macro-move analysis with micro-rhetorical investigation. As outlined in the Introduction, the central objective was to determine whether argumentative effectiveness derives primarily from structural organization or from the patterned realization of interpretation, comparison, and justification at the micro-discursive level. The findings lend support to the

latter position. While the macro-structural configuration of discussion sections displays relative stability across journals, persuasive force appears not to arise from structural compliance alone. Rather, it is shaped by the systematic orchestration of micro-rhetorical strategies. Interpretation functions as the constitutive core of the discussion genre; comparison operates largely through calibrated differentiation to articulate novelty; and justification relies predominantly on empirical citation to contribute to disciplinary legitimacy. Collectively, these dimensions suggest that argumentative effectiveness is achieved through strategic rhetorical integration rather than through the mere presence of conventional moves. The results further indicate that the discussion section operates as a site in which epistemic authority and disciplinary validation are progressively negotiated. Argumentative strength does not appear to derive from isolated rhetorical moves but from their hierarchical and patterned interaction. Authorial reasoning establishes intellectual ownership of claims; contrastive positioning situates findings in relation to prior scholarship; and intertextual support contributes to credibility within the discourse community. Through this layered progression, empirical findings are transformed into persuasive disciplinary contributions.

Theoretically, the study contributes to genre research by linking macro-structural models with micro-rhetorical enactment and by articulating a layered model of argumentative intensification. Methodologically, it demonstrates how qualitative genre analysis may be strengthened through systematic distributional mapping. Pedagogically, the findings offer an empirically informed framework for advanced academic writing instruction, particularly for scholars seeking publication in high-impact venues. The framework may help novice and developing researchers recognize that effective discussion writing requires not only the appropriate organization of rhetorical moves but also the ability to interpret findings, position them in relation to previous scholarship, and provide

adequate justification for the claims being advanced.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the corpus was limited to 30 empirical research articles published in Scopus-indexed Q1 linguistics journals between 2021 and 2024. Although this purposive sampling strategy was appropriate for examining expert-level disciplinary discourse, the relatively bounded corpus limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other journal quartiles, publication periods, or disciplinary contexts. Second, the study focused exclusively on linguistics and its selected subfields; consequently, the identified rhetorical patterns may reflect disciplinary conventions that are not necessarily shared across other fields. Third, the analysis relied on manually coded textual data, meaning that the identification of rhetorical functions involved interpretive judgment despite the systematic coding and reliability procedures employed. Finally, the study primarily examined the distribution and functional realization of rhetorical strategies rather than experimentally establishing their effects on readers' perceptions

of persuasiveness. The proposed layered progression should therefore be understood as an analytically supported rhetorical model rather than as a causal account of how readers evaluate academic arguments.

Future research might examine the transferability of this model across disciplinary contexts, investigate cross-cultural variation in micro-rhetorical realization, or employ larger-scale corpus and computational methods to refine and extend the framework. Future studies could also examine whether the identified rhetorical patterns vary according to journal quartile, disciplinary subfield, article type, or publication context, and could investigate how readers respond to different configurations of interpretation, comparison, and justification. By foregrounding the micro-mechanisms of argument construction, this study contributes to a more integrated understanding of how disciplinary knowledge is rhetorically produced and legitimized in contemporary scholarly communication.

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7. Author Declaration

- We confirm this paper is original work.
- We state this paper has no conflicts of interest.