Promotional strategies in English and Chinese research article introduction and discussion/conclusion sections: A cross-cultural study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores promotional strategies in English and Chinese introductions and discussion/conclusion sections of applied linguistics (AL) research articles (RAs). Based on genre analysis, a more comprehensive and fine-grained taxonomy of promotional strategies was developed for the two RA part-genres that show a symmetrical relationship in terms of their promotional moves. A higher degree of promotion is detected in our corpus, which may be due to the increasing marketization of academia and the nature of AL. Regarding the cross-cultural variations, it is found that English texts are more promotional than Chinese ones. In the introduction, Chinese writers tend to rely heavily on the top three most frequent promotional strategies in our corpus, while English writers are inclined to justify and reinforce the significance of the research topic or claims, demonstrating a strong argumentation pattern. In the discussion/conclusion section, Chinese writers are more likely to summarize and explain their research results whereas English writers show a preference for evaluation of their research findings. Competitive research/publication contexts, national culture, audience, and disciplinary writing conventions might contribute to such differences. The findings and discussion through the lens of interdiscursivity and intercultural rhetoric have implications for EAL/ESL academic writing research and pedagogy.

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, the situation of academic publishing has changed prominently as a consequence of globalization and marketization. Academia has become a highly competitive enterprise (Yang, 2016), which gives rise to the phenomenon of what Fairclough (1997) terms 'the marketization of academia'. Against this backdrop, it is assumed that journals, highly prestigious international journals in particular, seek to establish themselves as important and competitive commercial products via publishing important research (Carter, 2016). Undoubtedly, the high rejection rate becomes a brutal reality for researchers who are increasingly concentrating their efforts on publishing their works in important journals. Furthermore, EAL/ESL researchers have found that publishing in credible English international journals has been crucial for their visibility in the international academic community (Mur-Dueñas, 2012a). Therefore, it is overwhelmingly significant for authors to convince the gatekeepers of the novelty and

significance of their works to gain acceptance for publication. One way of realizing such an object is to promote the contributions of their research to the specific disciplinary domain.

There is a shift in academic writing from impersonally reporting research findings to arguing for and promoting one's research (see Lindeberg, 2004). This can be attributed to the current promotional culture as well as the increased competitiveness of modern science with promotion as a quintessential feature that functions to strengthen the value of one's studies (Bhatia, 2005). RAs entail the reconfiguration of generic resources in the context of globalization and marketization. Such generic reconfiguration, known as interdiscursivity, will be further discussed in Section 2.2.

As a persuasive rhetorical practice, the use of promotional elements has received considerable scholarly attention, which can be traced back to the examination of evaluative language resources. The last two decades or so have witnessed a large number of studies exploring authorial evaluation in academic writing (see Xie, 2020), among which promotional elements are included. For instance, proclaim and entertain options within the engagement system of appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005) are thought to help fulfill the promotional function when reporting one's research. For another example, some categorizations of interactional meta-discourse by Hyland (2005), such as boosters and self-mention, are thought to serve as promotional evaluation. The exploration of promotional features can also be noticed in the move analysis of academic writing. Following Swalesian (1990, 2004) CARS generic description for RA introductions, numerous studies have analyzed the communicative moves/steps of the various part-genres of English RAs. Typically, these studies have focused on the introduction and discussion/conclusion sections since both part-genres generally entail a number of rhetorical choices (e.g., Basturkmen, 2012; Loi, 2010; Sheldon, 2011; Yang & Allison, 2003). It is also proposed that promotion is an inherent part of such two part-genres (Lindeberg, 2004) for it is necessary to occupy a research niche by presenting the study in the opening section and evaluate the research results and spotlight the research contributions in the concluding section.

It is worth mentioning that the primary concerns of the studies reviewed above, however, are not specific examinations of the rhetorical strategies or linguistic choices of promotion despite the promotional tenor carried by certain aspects of rhetorical moves/steps or linguistic devices. The same issue applies to appraisal analysis for academic discourse. Despite the recognition that appraisal resources manifest prosodically across sentences, EAP research using the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005) tends to confine its analysis to lexico-grammatical realizations, and is not specifically concerned with the promotion within the discourse (see Zhang & Cheung, 2023). Studies concerning promotional metadiscourse in English RAs mainly examine specific linguistic realizations of promotional value, since there is no systematic analyzing framework for investigating promotional language in texts (see Afros & Schryer, 2009; Larsson et al., 2022). Another line of research has examined promotion in published RAs through genre analysis in terms of promotional functions or promotional strategies. For example, Martín and Pérez (2014) examined rhetorical practices used in RA introductions from a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary perspective. They focused on the promotional steps in Move 3 and compared English texts from international journals with Spanish texts from national journals. By integrating both research paths to approach the promotional rhetoric in RAs, Lindeberg (2004) investigated promotional steps and evaluative languages in RAs from the business disciplines. In this study, promotional models were proposed which evolved from the rhetorical models of Swales (1990) and Dudley-Evans (1989).

A wealth of research examining intercultural variations has compared the generic and rhetorical choices of published RAs by English L1 and L2 speakers (e.g., Shaw, 2003; Sheldon, 2011, 2019; Xu & Nesi, 2019) as well as comparing English academic writing with academic writing in other languages (e.g., Loi & Evans, 2010; Martín & Pérez, 2014; Sawaki, 2023; Shaw, 2003; Sheldon, 2011, 2019). Furthermore, with the influence of English as a lingua franca (ELF), the value of English as a target norm for cross-cultural communication has been questioned (McIntosh et al., 2017). In answer to the suggestion by Connor (2004) that the links between intercultural rhetoric and ELF require to be intensified, a number of studies have attempted to analyze the intercultural rhetoric features of RAs published in English international journals and in national journals through languages other than English (LOTE) (e.g., Martín & Pérez, 2014; Moreno, 2021; Perales-Escudero & Swales, 2011). The present study continues this line of research through conducting a cross-cultural comparison of promotional strategies within AL RAs in Chinese and English (not necessarily being used as an L1) published in local and international journals respectively. It is hoped that our study could raise cross-cultural awareness of EAL/ESL writers who strive to make their research published in international journals.

There are two studies that are closely related to our research. One is by Azizi et al. (2022) who investigated the value arguments in all the parts of applied linguistic RA introductions based on Carter's (2016) framework. The other is by Moreno (2021) who examined the promotional steps in discussion sections in English and Spanish based on Lindeberg's (2004) promotional model. While these studies look into the introduction and discussion sections of published RAs respectively, the similarities and differences and even the potential relationship between the two part-genres in the use of promotional strategies are underexplored. Moreover, as the promotional frameworks employed in both studies are based on earlier rhetoric models (see Carter, 2016; Lindeberg, 2004), they are large-grained, and some potential promotional strategies are neglected. In-depth studies are likely to develop more comprehensive frameworks.

In view of the above discussion, the present study explores the promotional strategies in applied linguistics RA introductions and discussion/conclusion sections (hereafter RAIs and RADCs) in English and Chinese through the lens of interdiscursivity and inter-cultural rhetoric. It is hoped that the research findings will provide EAL/ESL researchers with insights into the relationship between discourse practice and social-cultural concerns. Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

(1) What are the prominent promotional strategies deployed in English and Chinese applied linguistic introduction and discussion/conclusion sections?

(2) What are the cross-cultural variations in the use of promotional strategies in English and Chinese applied linguistic introduction and discussion/conclusion sections?

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Intercultural rhetoric

Intercultural rhetoric (IR) is considered as the development of contrastive rhetoric (CR) which has a long tradition in second language writing research and pedagogy (Connor, 2008). Connor (2004) explores the development of IR research methods from text analysis to context-sensitive analysis, highlighting its dynamic properties.

According to Connor (2008), IR builds three principles for the study of intercultural behavior in writing. The first of these principles views culture as a process in a certain context rather than an isolated product maintaining that texts should be understood in specific social contexts before identifying and explaining potential cross-cultural variations. The second contends that culture is multifaceted and dynamic, thereby researchers need to consider the intersecting forces of 'small cultures' (e.g., classroom culture, disciplinary culture) with 'big cultures' (e.g., national culture, ethnic culture) when analyzing and interpreting their data. The writing cultures in the present study mainly take into account two publication contexts, namely, the international culture and national culture, both embracing disciplinary culture (i.e., Social Science applied linguistics). The third holds that written texts can be viewed as interaction between writers and readers and entail negotiation and accommodation to better understand one another. Undoubtedly, the three principles enable us to better understand various aspects of any single intercultural interaction and different writing patterns across different languages.

2.2. Interdiscursivity

Interdiscursivity is a key concept in Critical Genre Analysis (CGA). It takes into account both text-internal resources and text-external factors in the examination of professional and academic discourse. Text-internal resources are seen as intertextual and text-external factors are seen as interdiscursive by nature (Bhatia, 2017). In this sense, textual analysis confined to the discourse space is inadequate for the construction and interpretation of specialized discourse communication, hence we need to distinguish discourse practices and professional practices and consider professional cultures in their socio-cultural space. Bhatia (2017) states that specialists in various professions appropriate semiotic resources from other discourse contexts and genres to achieve their particular discursive ends. It is such an attempt to develop hybrid and new forms by appropriating other generic resources and professional practices that contributes to interdiscursivity in discourse shaping.

The strong influence of promotional culture makes it even harder to maintain any individual generic boundary intact. In other words, the invasion of promotional elements into various discourse activities gives rise to the phenomenon of interdiscursivity. The RA is a case in point, as it has been colonized by promotional genre with the aim of achieving the author's private intentions.

3. Research methods

This study combines qualitative and quantitative research methods through the corpus-based textual analysis along with a statistical approach.

3.1. The corpus

A total of 60 RAIs and RADCs (30 in English and 30 in Chinese) from the field of AL were selected. Therefore, four datasets were included in this corpus, namely, C-RAIs, C-RADCs, E-RAIs, and E-RADCs. To ensure the comparability of the corpora that is critical for cross-cultural studies, it is necessary to sample texts that are similar to a high degree in the contextual conditions (see Moreno, 2008; Sheldon, 2011). In light of this, our data was selected according to the following criteria:

(i) Given that each discipline has its own writing convention, AL was selected simply because it is the discipline that the researchers in the domain are familiar with.
(ii) As different research paradigms may bring forth different text forms or schematic structures (Hu & Cao, 2015), the data were limited to empirical RAs with rhetorical moves that can be well analyzed according to Swales's (1990) move analysis paradigm.
(iii) The samples were selected using keywords (i.e., *discourse analysis/construction; second language writing; academic writing/ teaching*) to control for possible variations between research topics in terms of the rhetorical promotion.
(iv) All the sample articles were taken from the publication period of 2020–2022, considering the possibility that the rhetorical styles might change over time.
(v) Two peer-reviewed leading international journals, *English for Specific Purposes* and *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, were selected for the English data. Given that academic studies on the topics published in Chinese Social Science core journals within the same publication year range are much fewer compared to their English counterparts, three Chinese leading journals, namely, *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages, Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice,* and *Foreign Language Education* were chosen for the Chinese data in order to have a comparable number of satisfactory RAs.

(vi) Because Chinese RAs usually follow the I-LR-(TF)-*M*-R-D-(C) format, and the Introduction section is very short, the Introduction and Literature review sections were selected for the C-RAIs and the post-result sections for the C-RADCs. To make the Chinese and English data comparable maximally in terms of content and length, English RAs with the I-(TF)-*M*-R-D-(C) format were chosen and the Introduction was extracted for the E-RAIs and the post-result sections for the E-RADCs.

In sum, for the Chinese data, all the RAs which met the above-mentioned criteria were downloaded and those with more matching keywords were prioritized. Regarding the English data, around five satisfactory RAs were selected for each year; from each of the two journals. All the downloaded texts were first converted into txt format using AntFileConverter (Anthony, 2023). Then RAIs and RADCs were cleaned of figures, tables, footnotes, examples, and journal tags and stored in another plain text file. A description of the corpora is provided in Table 1.

3.2. Procedures

For the purpose of convenient text annotation, Swalesian (2004) CARS schema was used for the annotation of promotional strategies in the RAIs. The generic framework for RA discussion sections by Yang and Allison (2003) was adopted in the coding of the RADCs. Departing from the generic frameworks, this study annotated rhetorical steps by highlighting promotional functions from the perspective of interdiscursivity.

As the purpose of the current research is to identify promotional strategies through genre analysis of rhetorical moves and steps, promotional strategies are defined here as rhetorical text fragments that "can reasonably be seen as being explicitly used to increase credibility and convincingness" (Lindeberg, 2004. p. 81). With this definition in mind, promotional strategies were coded by searching for the linguistic features signaling a promotional rhetorical shift, supplemented with grasping topic breaks in content, a methodology that Moreno and Swales (2018) called a combination of bottom-up and top-down approach. The combined coding approach can "lead to a certain circularity of reasoning" (Moreno & Swales, 2018. p. 7), which makes our annotation more valid and precise. In line with Moreno and Swales's (2018) schemes for annotating a rhetorical step, communicative functions were perceived as the Tertium Comparationis. Therefore, segmentation boundaries were defined as follows in order to make our annotation consistent and explicit. First of all, for a text unit to be considered as a step, it had to include new propositional meaning vital to propel the text towards the achievement of the communicative purposes of the part-genre where it occurs. Furthermore, in this research only steps of a promotional nature were identified and labeled as promotional strategies, while non-promotional steps were left unannotated.

We coded separately the few cases where a subordinate clause contained new propositional meaning, from which the promotional strategy D-PS12 (Recommending future research) could be inferred, as in Example (1):

(1) Second, the current study did not systematically examine interdisciplinary variation in …, [D-PS11-Indirect] *which we intend to pursue in our future research.* [D-PS12-Indirect] (E-RADCs-2)

Text fragments involving I-PS13 (Underscoring researchers' literature-tracking ability) were coded twice since there are often embedded propositions within this promotional strategy. As shown in Example (2), the embracing unit constitutes I-PS13, while I-PS2 (Amplifying the significance of the topic) is embedded as part of it.

(2) A growing number of studies are investigating this construct in RAs (Casal et al., 2021; Nasseri, 2020; Yin et al., 2021) and in specific sections of RAs, including abstract (Ansarifar et al., 2018), introduction (Lu et al., 2020) and discussion (Khany & Kafshgar, 2016). [I-PS2-Direct] [I-PS13-Direct] (E-RAIs-13)

We proceeded with the coding of promotional strategies in three phases. In the first phase, 10 randomly sampled texts from each corpus (altogether 40 texts) were manually and independently analyzed by three researchers based on previous models of rhetorical structures of RAIs and RADCs (Swales, 1990, 2004; Yang & Allison, 2003) to identify the potential promotional steps. In this process, text fragments that were either ambiguous or could not be readily captured by the previous frameworks were noted and discussed. The final taxonomy of promotional strategies for RAIs and RADCs is included in Table 2 and Table 3. In the second phase, the 60 RAIs and RADCs in the corpus were independently coded by two researchers based on the established framework. The two coders specialized in discourse/genre analysis and EAP writing and teaching and were very familiar with Swales's move analysis. All the promotional strategies coded by each researcher were checked. The inter-rater agreement for the two sub-genres between the two researchers was computed using percent agreement. Relatively high agreement percentages of 90.3 % and 88.5 % were obtained respectively for RAIs and RADCs. The between-coder discrepancies were discussed and resolved. In the third phase, all the promotional strategies were classified into two categories: direct and indirect, both of which are explicit promotional strategies. In accordance with Lindeberg

Table 1
Description of the Chinese and English corpora.

	Chinese		English	
	RAIs	RADCs	RAIs	RADCs
No. Sentences	778	1298	1132	1350
Aver. Sentences/text	25.9	43.3	37.7	45
Total number of Chinese characters and English words	46,617	66,846	41,904	42,573

Note: Here every introduction or discussion/conclusion section is treated as a single text when statistics are made.

Table 2

Promotional strategies in the RA introductions.

Promotional strategy	Description	Move scope
I-PS1	Establishing the value of the research area	Move 1
I-PS2	Amplifying the importance of the topic	
I-PS3	Indicating a gap in previous research	Move 2
I-PS4	Pointing out problems in the real world	
I-PS5	Adding to what is known	
I-PS6	Justifying the research gap	
I-PS7	Announcing the present research purposely	Move 3
I-PS8	Demonstrating the advantages of the research method or theoretical framework	
I-PS9	Stating the value of the present research	
I-PS10	Rationalizing the research focus and design	
I-PS11	Highlighting the value of the research findings	
I-PS12*	Presenting the limitation of the current study	
I-PS13	Underscoring researchers' literature-tracking ability	Move 1/2

Note: * = Indirect promotional strategy.

Table 3

Promotional strategies in the RA discussion/conclusion sections.

Promotional strategy	Description	Move scope
D-PS1	Restating the purpose of the present research	Move 1
D-PS2	Highlighting the advantages of the research method	
D-PS3	Summarizing research results	
D-PS4	Reporting some interesting or important findings	
D-PS5	Accounting for results	
D-PS6	Making general conclusions	
D-PS7	Stating consistency with previous research	Move 2
D-PS8*	Stating inconsistency with previous research	
D-PS9	Explaining the inconsistency	
D-PS10*	Indicating caveats	
D-PS11*	Pointing out limitations of the present study	
D-PS12*	Recommending future research	
D-PS13	Suggesting practical application	Move 3
D-PS14	Claiming significance of the research	
D-PS15	Underscoring researchers' literature-tracking ability	Move 2/3

(2004), the former refers to rhetorical units that are overtly promotional whose purpose is to strengthen the contributions and validity of the current research whereas the latter refers to rhetorical steps that "at first glance seem face-threatening with regard to other researchers or … with regard to the current authors" (p. 81). Indirect promotional strategies in our data were represented by cases such as "Indicating caveats" and "Pointing out limitations".

Subsequently, the raw frequencies of the promotional strategies in the four corpora were tabulated. Following Lindeberg (2004), we compared the number of promotional strategies in relation to the total number of sentences in the corpus, which gave us a clearer picture of the degree of promotion than comparing promotional steps with the number of words. Chi-square tests were conducted to examine statistically significant differences in the proportion of promotional strategies in the Chinese and English corpora. The 'sentence' here was defined as a discourse unit signalled by a full stop or semicolon. Lastly, following the criteria developed by Soler-Monreal (2015), promotional strategies that occurred in at least 90 % of the texts were regarded as obligatory; at least 60 % as conventional; at least 30 % as optional; and less than 30 % as non-salient.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Prominent promotional strategies

2263 instances of prominent promotional strategies were identified, taking up 49.65 % of the total number of the sentences in our corpus. This finding supports the claim by Azizi et al. (2022) that AL RAs rely heavily on promotional strategies to evaluate the significance of the research topic and the contribution of the research findings. Beyond AL, it is in line with previous studies that have found that promotion permeates RAIs (Carter, 2016; Martín & Pérez, 2014) and RADCs (Moreno, 2021) and even entire RAs (Lindeberg, 2004).

In the following parts, promotional strategies identified in our corpus are illustrated to display how interdiscursivity is performed in discursive space to achieve discursive and professional ends (in the social-pragmatic space) within the disciplinary and professional culture (in the social-cultural space).

4.1.1. *Prominent promotional strategies in RAIs*

The Introduction section is a major territory for convincing the members of the discourse community of the need for the writers' research (Swales, 1990). As can be seen in Table 2, thirteen types of promotional strategies were identified in RAIs. These will be introduced and analyzed following the generic moves of Swalesian (1990) CARS model.

The promotional strategies I-PS1 (Establishing the value of the research area) and I-PS2 (Amplifying the significance of the topic) are used in Move 1 (Establishing a territory). The colonization of discourse by promotion in this communicative move aims to situate the work in "a lively, significant or well-established research area" (Swales, 1990. p.144) so as to 'hook' the readers. Both strategies serve the pragmatic function of centrality claims that are seen by Swales (1990) as 'appeals', as in Example (3):

> (3) *academic writers* need to use interpersonal linguistic resources effectively in order to … (Ling-Lam & Crosthwaite, 2018). This requirement can be met by academic writers' proper use of evaluative linguistic resources. [I-PS1-Direct] The importance of evaluative language in academic writing is highlighted in the work of a number of scholars (Hunston, 1989, 2000; Hyland, 2000; Martin, 2000; Pounds, 2015; White, 2002) as it plays a crucial role in … (Mei & Allison, 2003). [I-PS2-Direct] [I-PS13-Direct] (E-RAIs-1)

Statements of knowledge gaps function as promotion because they are used to build a call for the current research (Lindeberg, 2004). As shown in Table 2, four promotional strategies are manipulated to fulfill the pragmatic function of Move 2 (Establish a niche), among which I-PS6 (Justifying the research gap) is often employed to persuade readers that the study to be reported is essential and worthwhile. Example (4) is a case in point, where the importance of the gaps in previous research is intensified through claiming the issue's importance in the real world, with boosting signals i.e., *"全面"* (comprehensive) and *"掌握 … 全貌"* (give a full picture of).

> (4) 对于 … 整体性研究还不多见。[I-PS3-Direct]只有对它们进行全面研究,才能掌握语言学习者的语法隐喻能力的全貌。[I-PS6-Direct] (C-RAIs-23)
>
> [*Few existing studies* have *comprehensively* explored …. This line of research, however, *could give a whole picture of* the language learners' grammatical metaphor competence.]

Six types of promotional strategies were identified in Move 3 (Occupying the niche), which are deployed to intensify the credibility, novelty, and significance of the research as well as the value or relevance of the research findings' contribution.

I-PS7 (Announcing the present research) is mainly realized through explicit statements of the research purposes in response to the preceding research gaps, as in Example (5). Furthermore, the promotional power is increased by the following verb phrase "为 … 提供参考" (have implications for) to explicitly emphasize the value of the research (I-PS9). The promotional effect of I-PS9 resides in its indications of the significance of the topic in the research world or in the real world by offering implications for research and pedagogy.

> (5) 为了弥补这一缺憾,本研究旨在尽量全面地探析中外学者 …, [I-PS7-Direct] 为提升中国作者的英语学术写作能力提供参考。[I-PS9-Direct] (C-RAIs-13)
>
> [*To fill the research gap,* this study attempts *to comprehensively investigate* … in Chinese national and international journals. *It is hoped that this study can have implications for* the development of Chinese EAL writers' academic literacy.]

I-PS8 is employed to emphasize the advantages of the research methods or theoretical frameworks, often accompanied by positive attitude markers, as in Example (6):

> (6) Biber所创立的多维分析,有效地克服了传统语域研究的不足。[I-PS8-Direct] (C-RAIs-2)
>
> [The multidimensional analysis developed by Biber *has effectively overcome the problems* in traditional genre analysis research.]

Regarding I-PS10, scholars explicitly claim that the focus or design of their study is reasonable, ultimately enhancing the credibility of their research. Example (7) shows why the PhD abstract genre is chosen as the research focus.

> (7) *A linguistic reason is that* PhD abstracts of around 300 words are short move-intensive texts condensed from book-length theses. Therefore, … *more likely to* indicate rhetorical moves. [I-PS10-Direct] (E-RAIs-17)

I-PS11 highlights the significance of the research findings in general (see Example 8), while I-PS12 shows the remaining gap, which, however, enhances the magnitude of the value of the current contribution (see Example 9).

> (8) The findings and discussion offered here *paint a hitherto unseen picture* of how AC is being utilized by these writers … in a different language system. [I-PS11-Direct] (E-RAIs-18)
>
> (9) We *leave the systematic examination* of interdisciplinary variation in the mappings between p-frames and rhetorical move-steps in RA introductions *to a future study.* [I-PS12-Indirect] (E-RAIs-23)

Finally, it is shown that I-PS13 (Underscoring researchers' literature-tracking ability) frequently appears in Move 1 and Move 2 of RAIs. This aligns with Wang and Yang's (2015) claim that indicating the prevalence of relevant research is usually influenced by promotional concerns and demonstrates the relevance, significance, or popularity of the research area. This strategy was determined in our data on the condition that there were at least five references in a non-integral citation, or various research perspectives or research lines introduced regarding a research topic. This is illustrated in Example (10):

(10) The past decade witnessed a surge of L2 writing studies examining the quantitative relationship of syntactic complexity to language development (e.g., Chan, Verspoor, & Vahtrick, 2015; Crossley & McNamara, 2014; Yoon & Polio, 2017), language proficiency (e.g., Bulte & Housen, 2014; Lu, 2011; Lu & Ai, 2015), and language production quality (e.g., Biber et al., 2016; Kyle & Crossley, 2018; Yang, Lu, & Weigle, 2015). [I-PS2-Direct] [I-PS13-Direct] (E-RAIs-2)

4.1.2. *Prominent promotional strategies in RADCs*

The discussion/conclusion section goes beyond the factual presentation of the results by interpreting and assessing the significance and implications of the results (Swales, 2004). As presented in Table 3, fifteen categories of promotional strategies were identified. These are situated within Huckin's model (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995) for our analysis, as where the promotional strategies appear in the RADCs contributes to the rhetorical effect of the RA discourse.

Move 1 (Occupying the niche) involves restatements of the principal findings and claims of one's own study (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Six promotional strategies were adopted, shedding light on how the commitment made earlier has been fulfilled.

D-PS1 is promotional by nature since it aims to remind readers of the research topic and impress them that an original and valuable work has been conducted in response to the research questions, as in Example (11):

(11) *Our purpose in this paper has been to* explore … in the 3 MT genre, *a new and increasingly popular* format for presenting academic research. [D-PS1-direct] (E-RADCs-7)

Writers also promoted their research through D-PS2 which verified that the research methods adopted could be particularly helpful for obtaining newer, more comprehensive, and more reliable results. This can be seen in Example (12):

(12) The *improved approach* has *increased the statistical soundness* of results and enabled us to *more thoroughly look into* negation from an innovative SFL perspective. [D-PS2-Direct] (E-RADCs-16)

Writers tend to summarize their research results (D-PS3), helping readers to grasp the principal findings clearly, as in Example (13). Meanwhile, reporting some interesting or important findings (D-PS4) is the strategy used to provoke readers' interests, as in Examples (14):

(13) 词汇复杂度方面,在4项测量指标中,除MTLD 呈非显著性增长外,WL、LFW、CWR 均显著提高。[D-PS3-Direct] (C-RADCs-4)

[In terms of lexical complexity, significant improvement is observed in WL, LFW, and CWR, but not in MTLD.]

(14) *this study surprisingly found* substitution as the least frequent genre-based revision strategy among EAL student writers. [D-PS4-Direct] (E-RADCs-5)

D-PS5 (Accounting for results) is preferred by writers to legitimize their research results or claims to make them more reliable and acceptable to the audience. Example (15) illustrates this strategy, where citations are often used to obtain evidence from previous studies and "allow the authors to argue for the significance of their study by framing their findings as building on and contributing to the ongoing scientific dialogue" (Zhang & Cheung, 2023. p. 9).

(15) *A possible reason for* the shift to a more conventional IMRD form and variations on it in Science-based doctoral theses *could be* the increased pressure to publish for doctoral students. (Badenhorst; Xu 2016; Curry, 2016), [D-PS5-Direct] (E-RADCs-3)

D-PS6 aims to present conclusions drawn from the findings so as to contribute to the advancement of knowledge, as illustrated in Example (16):

(16) *One conclusion we can draw from these findings is that* … these dependent types. [D-PS6-Direct] (E-RADCs-13)

Promotional strategies are often used in Move 2 ((Re)establishing the niche) either to strengthen the magnitude of the current contribution or to establish a niche for recommending future research. In our corpora, two types of promotional strategies for niche establishment were observed.

The first type concerns comparing results with the literature, as proposed by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995). Yang and Allison (2003) also claim that comparison with related literature serves the purpose of establishing the significance of the research results in relation to the relevant field. Within this category, D-PS7 (Stating consistency with previous research), D-PS8 (Stating inconsistency with previous research), and D-PS9 (Explaining the inconsistency) are employed. The three promotional strategies function either to support the research results or to highlight the study's contribution in offering new insights. When there is inconsistency, reasons are provided to upgrade the credibility of the results. As Basturkmen (2012) points out, the patterns of evaluations intertwined with explanations serve to establish arguments about the significance and reliability of research findings. Example (17) illustrates these strategies:

(17) *The finding* concerning code-switching *is also in line with the results* of some previous studies (e.g., Azian et al., 2013; Shartiely, 2013; Zubaidi, 2014) [D-PS7-Direct] but contradictory to S'anchez-García's (2016) results. [D-PS8-Direct] T*his may be attributed to* the language policy of the EMI universities from which the data was collected. [D-PS9-Indirect] (E-RADCs-14)

The second type concerns evaluating and pointing out possible lines of future research, including D-PS10 (Indicating caveats), D-PS11 (Pointing out limitations), and D-PS12 (Recommending future research). They can be seen as ways of demonstrating the writers'

awareness of the scope of the current contribution, and showing their humility, thereby increasing the reliability. D-PS12 bears witness to the positively inspirational value of their research which is often expressed as a positive evaluation. Example (18) exemplifies the three strategies.

(18) the present study had intentionally *selected theses from a single institution* … contexts. [D-PS11-Indirect] *Nevertheless*, this might in turn *affect the generalizability of our findings* since …. [D-PS10-Indirect] *It might be interesting to* compare negation resources … in order to … [D-PS12-Indirect] (E-RADCs-16)

In accordance with Berkenkotter and Huckin's (1995) claim that Move 3 (Establishing additional territory) involves some comments on the implications of the authors' contributions, research significance in our data was found to be promoted through the promotional strategies D-PS13 (Recommending practical application) and D-PS14 (Stating the value of the present research). The former offers suggestions as to how the research results can lead to practical and pedagogical applications (see Example 19), while the latter highlights the contributions of the entire study or the research findings (see Example 20).

(19) Furthermore, the functionally categorized list of p-frames extracted from the annotated corpus *may become a useful resource for genre-based EAP pedagogy.* [D-PS13-Direct] (E-RADCs-23)

(20)本研究的设计、工具和分析模块对于未来其他领域的研究*具有借鉴价值*。[D-PS14-Direct] (C-RADCs-6)

[The design, tools, and analyzing model of the present research *can provide useful implications for* the studies on the hidden themes and shifts in academic texts from other disciplines.]

Finally, D-PS15 serves to legitimize the knowledge claims or to justify the current contribution in the RADCs, mirroring I-PS13 in the RAIs. Example (21) is the case in point.

(21) Particularly, the functions of code-switching were mostly found to be in accordance with *previous studies (*e.g., Al Makoshi, 2014; Azian et al., 2013; Macaro et al., 2020; Sahan & Rose, 2021; S'anchez-García, 2016; Shartiely, 2013; Zubaidi, 2014). [D-PS15-Direct] (E-RADCs-14)

As is shown above, a high degree of promotion detected in our corpus supports the view that promotion has become an inevitable marketing strategy in academic arena (Yang, 2016). Appropriation of generic resources of promotion in RAs simply responds to the social-cultural context, with growing global and local competition to publish high-quality papers, and the increasing marketization of academic publishing. Therefore, it is crucial for scholars to employ interdiscursive elements such as promotional strategies that function to render the topic significance even more remarkable and intriguing, with the aim of gaining the acceptance of the gate-keepers of a specific disciplinary community (Azizi et al., 2021). Moreover, the prominent use of promotional strategies could also be ascribed to AL's disciplinary nature. AL falls into the domain of social sciences that "create knowledge through cognitive interpretation, intellectual negotiation, and theoretical reasoning" (Zhang & Cheung, 2023. p. 2), so researchers in this field tend to be interpersonally involved in their writing to align the readers with the value argument. Furthermore, due to the applied and inter-disciplinary nature of AL, as noted by Wang and Yang (2015), research in this domain has fewer unified and established theoretical bases for knowledge construction. Therefore, AL research requires overt persuasion. This is particularly the case in the sample texts used for our study, which are primarily concerned with addressing language issues by adopting theories from other disciplines.

The discussion/conclusion section of a research article is symmetrical to its introduction in the use of promotional strategies. Specifically, in RAIs, writers start out by building a valuable research context for the current research when establishing a territory wherein the importance, relevance, and innovation of the topic can be highlighted. The authors then build a backdrop against which the importance of the current contribution stands out clearly when establishing a niche. In this way, the necessity and credibility of the
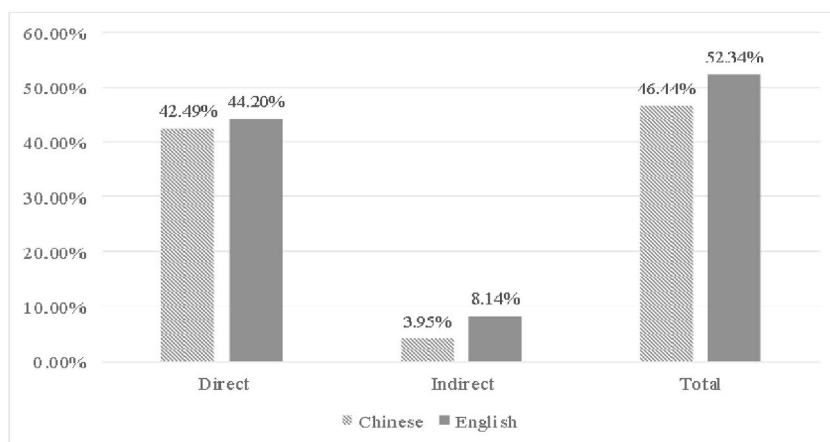

Fig. 1. Direct and indirect promotional strategies in RAIs and RADCs by language.
Note: Here the percentage refers to promotional strategies with the total number of sentences.

current research are enhanced. Finally, they announce the novelty and significance of the research when occupying the niche. In RADCs, conversely, writers start by restating the principal findings and claims of their own study to highlight their contribution to addressing prior limitations when occupying the niche. The authors then point out some remaining research gaps for future research to strengthen the value of the present contribution when (re)establishing the niche. Finally, they establish a popular and significant research area where future studies will be situated when establishing an additional territory.

4.2. Cross-cultural variations in promotional strategies

Fig. 1 presents the proportion of promotional strategies by language. It can be seen that the percentage of promotional strategies is higher in the E-RA corpus (52.34 %) than the C-RA corpus (46.44 %) and that the difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that English RAs are more promotional than their Chinese counterparts. Such a finding may not be so much an indication of Chinese traditional culture in highlighting the value of humility (Loi & Evans, 2010) but may rather reflect the more competitive environment of international journal publication (Sawaki, 2023). E-RAIs have a higher frequency of both direct and indirect promotional strategies than C-RAIs. This finding suggests that, on the one hand, English writers tend to deploy direct promotional strategies to highlight the contributions of their work, and on the other hand, take a critical stance to realize other promotional purposes, like enhancing the credibility of their study, giving the impression of being objective, and so on.

4.2.1. Cross-cultural variations of promotional strategies in RAIs

As can be seen in Table 4, a total of 458 promotional strategies were identified in C-RAIs and 625 ones in E-RAIs, with the proportion being more prominent in Chinese (58.87 %) than in English (55.21 %), though there is no significant difference ($p = 0.124 > 0.05$). This finding may suggest that Chinese writers are becoming nearly as promotional as their English counterparts in their RA introductions, due to the influence of the rhetorical conventions of empirical English RAs. This echoes Chen and Li's (2019) claim that Chinese students "were increasingly encouraged to follow the CARS model in general, and to perform niche establishment in particular, to achieve their goal of conducting innovative and original research" (p. 56).

It can be seen that the most frequent promotional strategies considered obligatory in both datasets are I-PS1 (Establishing a value research area), I-PS3 (Indicating a gap in previous research), I-PS7 (Announcing present research purposively), and I-PS13 (Underscoring researchers' literature-tracking ability). The first three represent the rhetorical moves of the Swalesian (1990) CARS model. As for the last one, its higher presence can be attributed to the main communicative purpose of the part-genre i.e., to situate the researcher's own study within a larger discursive context where a large number of citations are manipulated (Swales, 1990). Table 4 shows that the percentages of the four promotional strategies are higher in Chinese than in English. One possible explanation is that RAs written in LOTE from AL, wherein genre analysis has been extensively conducted, are more or less under the influence of the genre conventions of English RA writing (Sheldon, 2019). Therefore, Chinese writers tend to abide by Swales's 1990 version of the CARS model to make their papers more acceptable to their disciplinary community. This preference could be a sign of Chinese writers' lack of genre innovation, to some extent.

Regarding promotional strategies in Move 2, the overall proportion is higher in C-RAIs than in E-RAIs, which can be mainly attributed to the higher prevalence of I-PS3 (Indicating a gap in previous research) in the former dataset. The finding is partially consistent with Sawaki's (2023) observation that Japanese RAIs have a higher frequency of Move 2 steps than English RAIs. However, in Sawaki's study, the higher proportion of Move 2 in Japanese RAIs is ascribed to the significant presence of 'question raising', while 'gap indication' was more prevalent in the English corpus than in the Japanese one. This discrepancy may be due to disciplinary differences. In the present study, the Chinese AL RAs were considerably influenced by English RAs because the Chinese AL writers were aware of English RA structures. In contrast, Sawaki (2023) noted that the Japanese researchers from the field of Japanese Literature, a distinct research community, were less likely to be influenced by English RA writing conventions. Moreover, our finding stands in

Table 4
Promotional strategies used in Chinese and English introductions.

Category	Chinese (N = 30)			English (N = 30)		
	No. PS	% RAIs containing the PS	% PS	No. PS	% RAIs containing the PS	% PS
I-PS 1.	115	100	14.78	120	100	10.60
I-PS 2.	16	43.33	2.06	32	73.33	2.83
I-PS 3.	98	100	12.60	110	96.67	9.72
I-PS 4.	10	30	1.29	24	53.33	2.12
I-PS 5.	16	40	2.06	12	36.67	1.06
I-PS 6.	28	56.67	3.60	50	80	4.42
I-PS 7.	56	96.67	7.20	62	100	5.48
I-PS 8.	14	43.33	1.80	21	50	1.86
I-PS 9.	23	56.67	2.96	50	83.33	4.42
I-PS 10.	21	50	2.70	58	86.67	5.12
I-PS 11.	0	0	0	4	13.33	0.35
I-PS 12.	0	0	0	2	6.67	0.18
I-PS 13.	61	96.67	7.84	80	96.67	7.07
Total	458		58.87	625		55.21

Note: PS = promotional strategies; % PS means the PS in percentage of total no. Sentences.

contrast to the previous observation that RA introductions written in LOTE tend to involve a lower presence of Move 2 (Loi, 2010). Such a discrepancy is probably related to the increasing pressure on Chinese writers to publish in the increasingly competitive national journal market that prompts them to place their research in a superior position to others.

As regards promotional strategies in Move 3, I-PS12 (Presenting the limitation of the current study) seems to be avoided in both datasets, for this promotional strategy may seem "counterproductive" (Lindeberg, 2004. p. 84) and would put the reader off at the very beginning. As for I-PS11 (Highlighting the value of the research findings), there are only four instances in E-RAIs, providing evidence to support Martín and Pérez's (2014) statement that writers are not allowed to foreground the value of their research results in the opening section. This is the genre convention for RAs from the Social Sciences, particularly from the field of AL. I-PS9 (Stating the value of the present research) is frequently used in both datasets, with English writers using it more frequently than their Chinese counterparts. This result suggests that English writers are more focused on articulating the value of their research in introductions.

I– PS2 (Amplifying the importance of the topic) is the other promotional strategy within Move 1, and is considered optional in C-RAIs and conventional in E-RAIs. Combined with I-PS6 (Justifying the research gap) within Move 2 and I-PS10 (Rationalizing research focus and design) within Move 3 used in the two datasets, it can be inferred that compared with Chinese writers, English writers have the tendency to justify and reinforce the significance of the topic or claims conveyed by a preceding statement, demonstrating a strong argumentation pattern. This can be accounted for by the different degree of publishing competitiveness and readership between English international context and Chinese national context. English international academic community is 'close knit' with respect to research issues, in which there is fierce competition and its readership is more heterogeneous (Li & Xu, 2020). In contrast, Chinese national academic community is 'loose knit', in which there is not so aggressive competition and its readership is more homogenous who may have a lot of shared knowledge (Li & Xu, 2020). Therefore, writers of Chinese discourse prefer an independent strategy, reinforcing the belief that facts speak louder than words and leaving room for readers to judge the value of their research, while writers of English discourse prefer an involvement strategy and are inclined to make strong claims to engage and align readers with their viewpoints.

4.2.2. Cross-cultural variations of promotional strategies in RADCs

As shown in Table 5, a total of 506 promotional strategies were identified in C-RADCs and 674 in E-RADCs, with the percentage being higher in English (49.93 %) than in Chinese (38.98 %) making a significant statistical difference ($p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that English writers are much more promotional than their Chinese counterparts in RADCs. Compared with Chinese writers, they tend to balance the promotional force in both part-genres. This might be explained by English authors' awareness that discussions are the sections that readers nowadays consider the most important, as suggested in Pérez-Llantada (2013).

It can be seen that the most frequent promotional strategies in the Chinese RADCs fall in Move 1, including D-PS3 (Summarizing research results), D-PS5 (Accounting for results), and D-PS6 (Making general conclusions), while in the English RADCs, they are within Move 2 and Move 3, involving D-PS11 (Pointing out limitations of the present study), D-PS12 (Recommending future research), D-PS13 (Suggesting practical application), and D-PS14 (Claiming significance of the research). All these promotional strategies appear in at least 80 % of the texts with higher proportions. This discrepancy indicates that Chinese writers are inclined to promote their current contributions by explaining how the gaps stated in the introduction are addressed by their research findings. However, English writers prefer to express their contributions by overtly displaying the value of their research as well as stating its limitations and deficiencies. This finding may be attributable to the writing styles in the two different languages. According to Hinds (1987), English writing is more writer-responsible, while Chinese writing is more reader-responsible. Therefore, when dealing with the pragmatic function of promoting the value of the current research in RADCs, English writers take the responsibility to make clear the contributions of the current study, whereas Chinese writers only make a limited effort to comment on the present research, leaving readers to interpret its contribution.

Table 5
Promotional strategies used in Chinese and English discussion/conclusion sections.

Category	Chinese (N = 30)			English (N = 30)		
	No. PS	% RAIs containing the PS	% PS	No. PS	% RAIs containing the PS	% PS
D-PS 1.	26	73.33	2.0	40	76.67	2.96
D-PS 2.	8	16.67	0.62	17	46.67	1.26
D-PS 3.	68	86.67	5.24	51	83.33	3.78
D-PS 4.	14	26.67	1.08	42	60	3.11
D-PS 5.	108	83.33	8.32	61	56.67	4.52
D-PS 6.	62	86.67	4.78	41	70	3.04
D-PS 7.	59	70	4.55	56	66.67	4.15
D-PS 8.	13	26.67	1.0	24	43.33	1.78
D-PS 9.	6	16.67	0.46	17	26.67	1.26
D-PS 10.	9	20	0.69	20	56.67	1.48
D-PS 11.	26	53.33	2	60	86.67	4.44
D-PS 12.	34	60	2.6	96	90	7.11
D-PS 13.	20	53.33	1.54	45	86.67	3.33
D-PS 14.	50	76.67	3.85	97	86.67	7.19
D-PS 15.	3	10	0.23	7	20	0.52
Total	506		38.98	674		49.93

With respect to Move 1 promotional strategies, both groups of writers use D-PS5 (Accounting for results), D-PS3 (Summarizing research results), and D-PS6 (Making general conclusions) more frequently. Such a finding aligns with Parkinson's (2011) claim that the purpose of the discussion section is to state and explain findings and demonstrate to readers how knowledge claims are argued and proved. As for D-PS4, its range and frequency are much higher in English than in Chinese. This finding can be interpreted as a sign that English writers prefer to report their interesting or important findings as a mean of establishing the importance and originality of their studies or knowledge claims.

The cross-cultural differences in Move 2 promotional strategies in RADCs are prominent. The much higher overall proportion in the English dataset can be mainly attributed to the much larger presence of D-PS11 (Pointing out limitations of the present study) and D-PS12 (Recommending future research) in E-RADCs. This finding demonstrates that Chinese writers are prudent in deploying indirect promotional strategies given the potential negative effects, while English writers consider them as effective persuasive strategies. In addition, the far lower presence of D-PS8 (Stating inconsistency with previous research) and D-PS9 (Explaining the inconsistency) in both datasets suggests that English and Chinese writers tend to avoid criticizing and challenging previous research when commenting on their own results, though academic conflict is considered as an important contribution to academic knowledge development (Sadeghi & Alinasab, 2020).

Finally, there are also great cross-cultural differences in the use of Move 3 promotional strategies in RADCs, with its overall percentage being much higher in English than in Chinese. This difference primarily lies in the larger proportions of D-PS14 (Claiming significance of the research), suggesting that English scholars highlight the promotional effects of providing positive evaluations of their own studies or findings. This could be related to the avoidance of being too explicit in Chinese writing. An explicit effort to get readers aligned with the value of the writer's own work can indicate a lack of humility, which is not appropriate in traditional Chinese culture (Loi, 2010). In addition, this discrepancy demonstrates that Chinese writing fits within reader-responsible culture, as described by Hinds (1987), hence the implicitness of the Chinese rhetorical style requires more effort from readers to interpret and infer the value of the research.

5. Conclusion

Our study identified thirteen types of prominent promotional strategies in RAIs and fifteen types in RADCs, all of which serve the pragmatic function of promoting the contribution of the current research. The proposed models generated from the study are more comprehensive in comparison with the models by Lindeberg (2004). More promotional strategies were observed, creating a fine-grained taxonomy. Regarding the potential relationship between the two part-genres, it was found that the discussion/conclusion section of an article is symmetrical to its introduction in terms of the use of promotional strategies. Our findings support the argument that RAs are highly promotional (Wang & Yang, 2015) and provide further evidence for rhetorical differences of RAs between languages and cultures (see Sawaki, 2023).

There are cross-cultural similarities and differences between Chinese and English RAIs and RADCs. The similarities lie in the commonly acknowledged rhetorical purposes of the introduction and discussion/conclusion sections in academic writing. The differences could be ascribed to the following social-pragmatic and social-cultural factors: 1) different interpersonal strategies or writer/reader roles in academic writing in various cultures; 2) Chinese traditional culture highlighting humility and avoiding being too explicit; 3) the more competitive environment of international journal publication; 4) readers' divergent expectations; and 5) disciplinary writing conventions. It should be noted that any cross-cultural variation in terms of rhetorical aspects cannot be explicated solely by one of the contributed variables, because national and international cultural factors usually interact with the languages and disciplines that shape the rhetorical features of the academic discourse published in different contexts (Yakhontova, 2006).

This study has significant implications for EAL/ESL academic writing research and pedagogy. Our fine-grained taxonomy of promotional strategies can provide EAP instructors/researchers with a useful tool to capture promotional arguments and promotional functions more comprehensively. Our results and discussion offer researchers valuable insights into promotional rhetoric in academic discourse, showing how promotional strategies can be manipulated within applied linguistics RAs in response to the increasingly promotional nature of academia. The results of our study can be used as an educational tool by EAP teachers to develop instructional materials and design pedagogical activities with a particular focus on promotional rhetoric, which we believe would benefit EAL/ESL writers who need to publish their work in international journals.

However, this study still has some limitations. First, it is based on a small corpus from the single discipline of applied linguistics. Future studies can adopt a cross-disciplinary or discipline-specific approach to examine promotional strategies in academic genres with reference to a larger corpus. Second, it only focuses on the functional category of promotional rhetoric in RA discourse. Future research could investigate how promotional strategies are realized by evaluative linguistic features and how they are mitigated by hedging devices to balance the acts of promotion and politeness so as to increase the persuasive effects in academic discourse. Third, it would be interesting to examine to what extent EAL/ESL writers adapt their national rhetorical practices with the aim of constructing their English academic discourse in the manner expected by readers from the international English-speaking academic community.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Liming Deng: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Yanfan Cheng:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Xiaoping Gao:** Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data

curation, Conceptualization.

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