

Humanising Language Education in the 'GenAI Age'

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Abstract

This presentation looks at the intensifying presence and influence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in language education, in the contexts of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and written composition within university-level English as a foreign language (EFL) programs. It offers four main arguments. Firstly, and *contra* much of existing research on the subject, the study of the effects of GenAI use on language learning and teaching should be grounded in robust philosophical—rather than technicist—principles capable of explaining what I consider to be the 'intrusion' of GenAI technology in language education, as well as the potentially negative impact of its use by learners, as relational evils. Secondly, and somewhat contrasting from Margaret Archer's commentaries on GenAI prior to her unfortunate passing, and Mark Carrigan's optimistic assessment of the benefits of GenAI technology in academia, for students to develop language skills, critical thinking skills, rhetorical skills, and in a general sense, their academic voice, GenAI writing tools cannot be considered as reliable 'writing companions' or 'tutors', given their disembodied nature, their inability to tell truth from falsehood, and their inability to be party to the social norms humans live by. Thirdly, and building on the two previous arguments, increasing use of GenAI tools is likely to have detrimental effects, largely because language learners can too easily bypass crucial stages in the development of their language and written composition skills. Fourthly, critical realism facilitates the study of the GenAI-language learning interaction, and by extension helps fulfil humanist goals in language education (irrespective of GenAI use by language learners), given its stratified and relational ontology. However, instead of conceptualising the GenAI-people interaction in general terms, we need to be specific about who GenAI users are, and account for their differing needs and potentials.