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Promoting AI Literacy among English Language and Literature and Translation Majors

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Abstract

This paper explores the effects of instruction that promoted AI literacy in English Language and Literature and Translation courses at an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) institution in southern China following the launch of ChatGPT-3, which prompted a global debate on the role of AI in education. It explores how pedagogical frameworks and teacher-student relationships shaped student engagement with AI while considering the technologization of education and its impacts on second language writing instruction. The study involved two different groups: Year 1 students in an Introduction to Corpus Linguistics course, and Years 3 and 4 students in a Learning through Digital Narratives course. Following the AI literacy framework suggested by Tseng and Warschauer (2023), the courses incorporated a variety of activities intended to facilitate students' reflection on the affordances and limitations of AI tools and AI-generated products. Findings show that while AI tools can enhance text quality, they can also produce results that can be either vague or authoritative, potentially erasing the students' voice or style. The paper concludes by highlighting how teachers and students can benefit from their increased awareness of the potential and limitations of AI as well as the integration of AI into the curriculum to promote AI literacy in EMI higher education.

Keywords: AI literacy, L2 writing; corpus linguistics, digital narratives, higher education

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Introduction

More so than ever given recent advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the digital world is reshaping society and communication and redefining interactions, information exchanges, teaching, and assessment (Kohnke et al., 2023a; Rudolph et al., 2023). In particular, the impact of AI around the world is evident in the common issues it has raised, including, among others, fear of textual appropriation and plagiarism (Eaton, 2023; Moorhouse et al., 2023; Warschauer et al., 2023), lack of authenticity, creativity and reliability (Bishop, 2023; Blodgett et al., 2020; Habib et al., 2024), and cultural bias (Blodgett et al., 2020; Dai & Hua, 2024). Above all, the quality of AI-generated texts and machine translation tools is perceived to be a threat to both current and future translators and language teachers but also to prospective students in the field (Tavares et al., 2023).

AI chatbots such as ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2023) have gained momentum among students, particularly thanks to the human-like, natural-sounding responses (Bishop, 2023) generated by those tools. However, students might judge AI-generated texts to be more "natural" than those that they may be able to produce (Kohnke et al., 2023a). As a result, students may fail to identify elements of those texts that might sound robotic and make a negative impression on the reader (Berber Sardinha, 2024). In fact, Liang et al. (2023, p. 3) argue that texts produced by non-native writers of English are more likely to be labeled as AI-generated because they "may increasingly use GPT legitimately as a way to improve their English and adopt certain grammatical structures common in GPT models." This, in turn, would marginalize this very large group of English writers (including the author of this paper), thus promoting inequity, an outcome that is very much against the aims of the *AI for All* campaign initiated by UNESCO. To tackle this difficulty, Liang et al. argue for promoting dialogue among all stakeholders involved, including policy makers, teachers, students, and materials developers.

This paper reports on how I personally worked to address these issues while working with English and Translation majors in an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) institution based in China when the launch of ChatGPT-3 provoked a global response from universities around the world. It discusses how and why pedagogical frameworks guiding the use of AI in the classroom were particularly helpful, and even more notably, it highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships in the use of technology in teaching and learning.