

FROM HUMAN DISCOURSE TO AUTOMATED DISCOURSE: LINGUISTIC AGENCY AND COMMUNICATION IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Rajab Jafarli

Nakhchivan State University

English language and translation department

ORCID: 0000-0002-1375-4034

Abstract. *The rapid integration of artificial intelligence into contemporary communication has introduced a new form of discourse production that challenges traditional assumptions about language, agency, and authorship. Unlike earlier technologies that primarily transmitted human language, AI systems actively generate, interpret, and reshape discourse across academic, professional, and digital environments. This study conceptualizes automated discourse as a hybrid communicative phenomenon emerging at the intersection of human intentionality and algorithmic generation.*

Drawing on discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and digital linguistics, the article examines the ontological distinction between human and AI-generated discourse, the structural mechanisms of AI language production, and the transformation of authorship in human–AI interaction. In addition to its theoretical framework, the study incorporates an empirical component based on survey data collected from academics across universities in Azerbaijan, including a significant proportion of linguists. The findings reveal that AI-generated discourse is perceived as neither fully equivalent to nor entirely distinct from human discourse, reflecting an emerging epistemological ambiguity. The results further demonstrate a shift toward distributed authorship, increasing recognition of AI as a communicative participant, and a substantial influence of AI on linguistic practices and stylistic norms.

The study also highlights cautious but growing trust in AI-generated content, alongside strong consensus regarding the need for ethical transparency in AI-assisted communication. Participants widely anticipate a future characterized by hybrid communicative ecologies in which human and AI contributions are increasingly intertwined.

The article argues that artificial intelligence should not be understood as replacing human communication, but as reconfiguring the ecology of discourse by expanding the modes through which language is produced, circulated, and interpreted. It concludes that automated discourse represents a structurally grounded, empirically observable, and transformative development in the evolution of language, requiring linguistics to move beyond exclusively human-centered models and to incorporate non-human yet socially meaningful language production into its theoretical scope.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence; automated discourse; digital linguistics; authorship; discourse analysis; language change; human–AI communication; pragmatics*

Introduction

Language has always evolved in response to social, cultural, and technological change. In the digital age, however, the rapid development of artificial intelligence has introduced a qualitatively new condition into communicative life: systems capable not only of transmitting language, but of generating, organizing, and actively participating in discourse at scale. This transformation marks a significant shift in linguistic

environments, as discourse is no longer produced exclusively by human speakers and writers. Instead, communication increasingly takes place within hybrid ecosystems shaped by continuous interaction between human users and computational systems (Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020; Bender et al., 2021; Hohenstein et al., 2023).

The emergence of AI-generated discourse raises fundamental theoretical questions for linguistics. Traditional approaches have long conceptualized language as an inherently human capacity grounded in cognition, intention, lived experience, and social interaction. Yet contemporary AI systems produce coherent, context-sensitive, and socially interpretable language without consciousness, intentionality, or embodied experience (Hicks et al., 2024; Jenks, 2025). This development creates a critical tension between the structural fluency of automated discourse and the human-centered assumptions that have historically shaped linguistic theory. As a result, existing frameworks are increasingly insufficient to fully account for non-human yet socially meaningful language production.

At the same time, the growing integration of AI into everyday communication is not merely a theoretical issue but an observable social phenomenon. Academics, students, and professionals increasingly engage with AI systems in writing, knowledge production, and discourse formation. These practices raise important empirical questions concerning how AI-generated discourse is perceived, how it influences linguistic behavior, and how it reshapes concepts such as authorship, agency, trust, and ethical responsibility. Despite the expanding literature on artificial intelligence, relatively limited attention has been given to the intersection between theoretical models of discourse and empirical evidence of how users interpret and engage with AI-mediated communication.

In this context, the present study examines automated discourse as a hybrid communicative phenomenon situated at the intersection of human intentionality and algorithmic generation. The article integrates a theoretical framework grounded in discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and digital linguistics with an empirical investigation based on survey data collected from academics across universities in Azerbaijan. By combining conceptual analysis with empirical insights, the study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical abstraction and lived communicative practice.

Specifically, the article explores how AI-generated language differs from human discourse in ontological and epistemological terms, how it is produced through probabilistic and contextual modeling, and how it transforms authorship, language change, power relations, and communicative practices. It also investigates the ethical, cognitive, and pragmatic implications of human–AI interaction, including issues of trust, transparency, and responsibility in AI-assisted communication.

The central argument of the study is that artificial intelligence should not be understood as replacing human communication, but as reconfiguring the ecology of discourse by expanding the modes through which language is produced, circulated, and interpreted. By situating automated discourse within both theoretical and empirical perspectives, this research contributes to emerging discussions on non-human language production and highlights the need for linguistics to move beyond exclusively human-centered models toward more inclusive frameworks capable of addressing hybrid communicative systems in the twenty-first century.

Research Gap

Although a growing body of research addresses artificial intelligence, natural language generation, and digital communication, significant gaps remain in understanding automated discourse as a linguistic and communicative phenomenon grounded in both theory and empirical practice. Existing studies tend to focus predominantly on either the technical architecture of AI systems or the ethical implications of their use. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they often overlook the need for an integrated linguistic perspective that examines how AI-generated discourse functions within real communicative environments.

In particular, limited attention has been given to the empirical dimension of automated discourse, namely how it is perceived, interpreted, and utilized by language-aware users such as academics and linguists. Questions concerning the ontological status of AI-generated discourse, its perceived agency, and its role in reshaping authorship, language change, and communicative norms remain insufficiently explored through empirical data. As demonstrated by the survey findings in this study, users do not hold fixed or uniform positions regarding AI discourse; instead, they exhibit epistemological ambiguity, negotiating its status between human-like communication and algorithmic production.

Furthermore, the interaction between theoretical models of discourse and observable shifts in linguistic practice remains underdeveloped in the literature. There is a lack of studies that connect abstract concepts such as distributed authorship, hybrid communicative agency, and discourse ecology with real-world evidence of how AI influences writing practices, stylistic norms, trust, and ethical awareness. This gap limits the ability of linguistics to fully account for the ongoing transformation of communication in AI-mediated environments.

This study addresses these gaps by combining an interdisciplinary theoretical framework with empirical evidence derived from academic users, offering a more comprehensive understanding of automated discourse as a hybrid communicative form situated between human intentionality and algorithmic generation. In doing so, it contributes to the development of linguistically grounded, empirically informed models of discourse that reflect the realities of contemporary communication.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is automated discourse perceived in relation to human discourse in terms of agency, intention, and communicative structure within academic contexts?
2. In what ways does artificial intelligence reshape the ecology of communication, particularly through the emergence of distributed authorship and human–AI co-creation?
3. How does AI-generated discourse influence linguistic practices, including writing style, vocabulary use, and the standardization or transformation of language?
4. What levels of trust and ethical awareness characterize human–AI interaction, and how do these shape attitudes toward transparency, authorship, and responsibility in AI-assisted communication?
5. How can linguistic theory be expanded and adapted to account for the increasing presence of non-human yet socially meaningful language production, as reflected in both theoretical models and empirical user perceptions?

Aim of the Study

The main aim of this article is to examine automated discourse as a new form of language production and to analyze its implications for communication, authorship, linguistic change, and contemporary linguistic theory.

Objectives

To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

- to define automated discourse within the framework of digital linguistics;
- to distinguish between human discourse and AI-generated discourse;
- to explain the structural mechanisms of AI language generation;
- to analyze the impact of AI on communication ecology and distributed authorship;
- to explore the relationship between automated discourse, language change, and power;
- to evaluate the ethical, cognitive, and pragmatic consequences of AI-mediated communication.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methodological approach that combines qualitative conceptual analysis with empirical survey-based investigation. The integration of these two components allows for a comprehensive examination of automated discourse as both a theoretical construct and a socially observable communicative phenomenon.

At the theoretical level, the study is grounded in a qualitative, interpretive research design. It draws on critical review, conceptual analysis, and theoretical synthesis of recent scholarship in digital linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and AI-mediated communication. This component aims to develop an interdisciplinary analytical framework for understanding automated discourse as a hybrid form of language production situated between human intentionality and algorithmic generation.

The qualitative approach incorporates:

1. Conceptual analysis, to clarify the ontological and epistemological distinctions between human discourse and AI-generated discourse;
2. Theoretical synthesis, to integrate perspectives from discourse theory, sociolinguistics, and digital communication studies;
3. Critical discourse-oriented interpretation, to examine how automated discourse interacts with language change, authorship, communicative agency, and power structures.

In order to complement and empirically support the theoretical framework, the study also includes a quantitative survey component. A structured questionnaire was administered to academics from various universities in Azerbaijan, with a notable representation of linguists and language-related disciplines. This sample was selected due to its relevance for evaluating discourse-related phenomena from an informed and analytical perspective.

A total of 132 valid responses were collected and analyzed. The survey instrument was designed in alignment with the study's theoretical constructs and included questions addressing:

- perceived differences between human and AI-generated discourse,
- the notion of communicative agency,
- authorship and co-creation,

- the influence of AI on language use,
- trust and reliability in AI-generated content,
- ethical considerations related to AI-assisted communication,
- and expectations regarding the future of human–AI interaction in discourse.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, focusing on frequency distributions and proportional analysis. The purpose of this quantitative component is not to establish causal relationships but to provide empirical insight into user perceptions and communicative practices, thereby grounding the theoretical discussion in real-world evidence.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches enables a more robust understanding of automated discourse. While the qualitative framework provides conceptual depth and theoretical explanation, the survey data offer empirical validation and reveal how these processes are experienced and interpreted by academic users. This combined methodology is particularly appropriate for the present study, as it seeks not only to theorize AI-mediated discourse but also to demonstrate its observable impact on contemporary linguistic practice.

The relationship between language, technology, and communication has long occupied a central position in linguistics and discourse studies. Early research on mediated communication emphasized how technological environments reshape linguistic practices, interactional norms, and discourse structures. Studies in computer-mediated communication demonstrated that digital environments blur the boundaries between spoken and written language, producing hybrid communicative forms characterized by immediacy, interactivity, and multimodality (Herring, 2004; Crystal, 2011). These foundational works established that technological change does not merely transmit language but actively transforms discourse practices and communicative behavior.

Within discourse theory, scholars have consistently highlighted the relationship between language, power, and social structure. Critical discourse analysis conceptualizes discourse as a socially embedded practice shaped by ideology, institutional frameworks, and power relations (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 2008). Similarly, sociological approaches emphasize the role of symbolic power and linguistic capital in determining communicative legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991). These perspectives remain highly relevant in the context of artificial intelligence, as AI-mediated discourse is embedded within technological infrastructures that influence whose language is amplified, normalized, or marginalized.

Recent advances in artificial intelligence, particularly in large language models, have significantly expanded the scope of discourse production. Studies demonstrate that AI systems are capable of generating coherent and contextually appropriate language through probabilistic modeling of large-scale textual data (Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020; Bender et al., 2021). This has led to growing debate regarding the epistemological and ontological status of AI-generated discourse. Some scholars argue that such discourse represents a form of probabilistic simulation rather than genuine communicative expression, emphasizing the absence of intention, consciousness, and experiential grounding despite high levels of structural fluency (Hicks et al., 2024).

At the same time, research has increasingly examined the social and communicative implications of AI-mediated interaction. Empirical studies suggest that engagement with AI systems influences linguistic practices, communication patterns,

and even social relationships by introducing new forms of collaborative discourse production (Hohenstein et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). Additionally, concerns related to trust, bias, representation, and ethical responsibility have become central in discussions of automated discourse, particularly as AI-generated language is often perceived as authoritative or neutral (Jenks, 2025; O'Regan, 2025). These debates highlight the need for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate linguistic, technological, and ethical perspectives.

Despite this growing body of research, the linguistic implications of automated discourse remain insufficiently theorized, particularly in relation to empirical user perception and communicative practice. Much of the existing literature focuses either on the technical functioning of AI systems or on normative ethical considerations, with comparatively limited attention given to how AI-generated discourse is interpreted, negotiated, and integrated into real-world communication. In particular, questions concerning the ontological distinction between human and AI discourse, the emergence of distributed authorship, and the role of automated discourse in shaping language use and stylistic norms require further empirical grounding.

Recent empirical insights, including the findings of the present study, suggest that users do not adopt fixed or uniform positions regarding AI-generated discourse. Instead, they exhibit epistemological ambiguity, perceiving AI discourse as neither fully equivalent to nor entirely distinct from human communication. Furthermore, users increasingly recognize AI as a participant in communication rather than merely a tool, while also acknowledging its influence on writing practices, linguistic choices, and communicative norms. These findings indicate that automated discourse is not only a theoretical construct but also a socially experienced phenomenon that actively reshapes discourse ecology.

Therefore, there is a clear need for research that bridges the gap between theoretical models of automated discourse and empirical evidence of its use and perception. This study contributes to the literature by integrating conceptual analysis with survey-based empirical data, offering a more comprehensive understanding of automated discourse as a hybrid communicative form. By linking discourse theory with observable communicative practices, it advances the development of linguistically grounded frameworks capable of accounting for human–AI interaction and the evolving nature of language in the digital age.

Methodological Extension: Empirical Component

While the primary design of this study is qualitative and conceptual, an additional empirical component was incorporated to support and validate the theoretical framework. A structured survey was conducted among academics from different universities in Azerbaijan, with a particular concentration of participants from linguistics-related fields. This sample is especially relevant, as respondents possess disciplinary awareness of language, discourse, and communication processes.

A total of 132 valid responses were collected and analyzed. The survey focused on key dimensions derived from the theoretical model of automated discourse, including:

- perceived differences between human and AI-generated discourse,
- communicative agency,
- authorship,
- influence on language use,
- trust and reliability,

- ethical considerations,
- and expectations regarding the future of communication.

The survey employed Likert-scale and categorical questions, enabling both interpretive and quantitative insights into how AI-mediated discourse is perceived in academic contexts.

Empirical Findings and Theoretical Integration

The results provide strong empirical support for the conceptualization of automated discourse as a hybrid communicative phenomenon.

First, regarding the distinction between human and AI-generated discourse, respondents did not demonstrate a strong consensus. The majority selected neutral or moderately differentiated positions, indicating that AI-generated language is neither fully equated with nor entirely separated from human discourse. This reflects an emerging epistemological ambiguity, supporting the theoretical claim that automated discourse occupies an intermediate ontological position between human intentional communication and algorithmic generation .

Second, perceptions of communicative agency further reinforce this ambiguity. While a significant portion of respondents remained undecided, a considerable number attributed partial or full agency to AI systems. This suggests that AI is increasingly perceived not merely as a passive instrument, but as an active participant in communication. Such findings empirically support the argument that communicative agency is becoming distributed across human and non-human actors, challenging traditional human-centered models of discourse.

Third, the findings on authorship provide one of the most decisive empirical confirmations of the theoretical framework. The majority of participants recognize shared or collaborative authorship between humans and AI systems. This demonstrates a clear shift from individual authorship toward distributed authorship, where discourse emerges through interaction between human intentionality and algorithmic processes. This aligns directly with the article's argument that AI-mediated communication transforms the concept of authorship into a co-constructed phenomenon.

Fourth, the influence of AI on language use appears highly significant. Most respondents report that AI affects their writing style, vocabulary, and expression to a moderate or strong degree. This finding provides concrete empirical evidence that automated discourse actively participates in language change, not only by accelerating the circulation of linguistic forms but also by shaping stylistic norms and communicative expectations. It confirms that AI functions as both a stabilizing and transformative force in linguistic evolution.

Fifth, the analysis of trust reveals a cautious but generally positive orientation toward AI-generated content. Most respondents situate themselves in a neutral or moderately trusting position, indicating that AI has achieved a degree of functional legitimacy in academic and professional contexts. However, the absence of strong trust suggests that AI discourse has not yet attained full epistemic authority, reflecting an ongoing process of negotiation between acceptance and skepticism.

Sixth, ethical awareness emerges as a strong area of consensus. A clear majority of participants agree that the use of AI in writing should be disclosed, either always or depending on context. This highlights a growing recognition of the importance of transparency, accountability, and academic integrity in AI-mediated communication. The findings reinforce the argument that ethical considerations are central to the

integration of automated discourse into institutional and academic practices. Finally, respondents' perspectives on the future of communication strongly support the theoretical model of a hybrid communicative ecology. Most participants anticipate a future characterized by collaboration between humans and AI, while a substantial proportion even foresee a dominant role for AI in communication. Only a minimal number consider AI to have limited impact. This indicates that AI is widely perceived as a transformative force in discourse evolution, confirming the article's claim that communication is becoming increasingly distributed, interactive, and technologically mediated.

Synthesis: Empirical Validation of the Theoretical Model

Taken together, the survey results provide robust empirical validation for the central argument of this study. Automated discourse is not perceived as replacing human communication, but as reconfiguring the communicative environment through hybridization, collaboration, and structural mediation.

The data confirm that:

- discourse is increasingly co-produced by humans and AI,
- authorship is becoming distributed rather than individual,
- language change is being accelerated and reshaped by AI systems,
- communicative agency is becoming decentralized,
- and ethical awareness is emerging as a key regulatory dimension.

At the same time, the presence of uncertainty—particularly in perceptions of agency and ontological status—indicates that this transformation is still ongoing. Users are actively negotiating the boundaries between human and AI-generated discourse, reflecting a transitional stage in the evolution of communication.

Conclusion

This empirical extension strengthens the theoretical contribution of the study by demonstrating that the transformation of discourse is not merely conceptual but already observable in academic practice. The findings confirm that automated discourse represents a structurally grounded, socially meaningful, and empirically validated shift in communication, requiring linguistics to expand its analytical frameworks beyond exclusively human-centered models.

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