The Role of Assessment in Business English and AI

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Abstract

This conference paper explores the learning potential of incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into business writing assignments, focusing on the assessment of resulting hybrid texts—texts produced through collaboration between human and machine writing. It further examines whether educators can adopt a role more akin to language coaches rather than simply acting as plagiarism monitors. Methodologically, the research draws on first-hand experiences from the Business English and AI Spring 2024 class, using student assignments as primary sources. Specifically, the analysis is based on student portfolios, which encompassed the four core English skills. The findings suggest that shifting the approach toward AI usage in education—from one driven by suspicion to a multi-layered assessment strategy similar to evaluating academic sources—can reduce the need for constant "guesswork" about students' reliance on AI. Instead, the focus can be placed on assessing the proper citation and integration of AI-generated content, much like how conventional scholarly sources are evaluated. Notably, some inexperienced students received lower grades due to their failure to properly credit AI sources, similar to the penalties for improper citation of academic references. Rather than viewing these cases as grounds for accusations of plagiarism, they are seen as valuable learning opportunities for both students and educators, particularly given that this was a pilot course involving AI novices. Looking forward, the future of Business English and AI courses will depend on both advancements in AI technology and the cultivation of responsible AI usage among educators. As instructors refine their ability to design assignments that effectively incorporate AI tools, students will be better equipped to use AI as a writing aid rather than merely a solution provider. The continued evolution of AI, coupled with pedagogical improvements, holds significant potential for enhancing language learning outcomes in educational contexts.

Keywords: *ethics, assessment, non-native speakers, artificial intelligence, plagiarism, writing*

For the past five years, I have taught Business English in the Faculty of Business and Economics at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. My courses have included Business English both as an independent minor and in combination with other disciplines. In Spring 2024, I introduced advanced Business English assignments that incorporated Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a writing tool. This integration raised numerous ethical concerns, which are the focus of this paper.

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the use of AI in my Business English course, specifically its role as a writing aid. The study aims to determine whether instructors can transition from the role of a "plagiarism police" to that of a language coach. In other words, what is the appropriate role of assessment when AI is involved in student work, where the boundaries between human and machine-generated content are blurred? The central question, then, is: what should assessment look like when the contributions of AI in student texts are unclear?

Methodology

The research methodology is based on my first-hand experience teaching a Business English and AI pilot course. Students in this course were required to submit three portfolios, each containing multiple assignments designed to assess their proficiency in the four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This paper focuses on assignments from the first portfolio, the "Reading and Writing Portfolio," which provides insights into how students used AI in their work.

Case Study: Business Letter Assignment

One of the assignments I asked students to write was a business letter using AI as a tool. The assignment was as follows:

Assignment
You work for a B2B company struggling in a recession. The front desk has received a phone call from a major client expressing concern about rumors that your company is facing financial difficulties and may go out of business.

Write a formal letter to the client in which you:
- Deny the rumor
- Explain the current status of the company
- Describe your company's plans for future growth
- Express hope for continuing the business relationship

The letter should be 200-250 words and adhere to a formal business letter format.

Part 2: Using AI

Students were required to write an original version of the letter and then submit it to ChatGPT for grammar and punctuation suggestions. They were instructed to revise their original version, using no more than 30% of ChatGPT's suggestions, and submit both the original letter, the AI suggestions, and the final revised version.

Evaluation and Results

The instructions for this assignment were clear: students were to write their own letter, gather feedback from AI using this prompt, "Please provide suggestion comments to improve the following letter with explanations of the changes suggested for grammar and punctuation," and then selectively incorporate those suggestions. A majority of students followed the instructions correctly. However, upon reviewing the submissions, it became evident that some students had used ChatGPT to generate their original letter. This presented a problem—when they submitted the AI-generated letter for suggestions, ChatGPT had little to suggest, resulting in minimal revisions. In some cases, the revision was almost identical to the AI-generated first draft, with students failing to highlight any changes because none were made.

Analysis of Student Work

To illustrate this issue, I will walk through a specific student's process. Here is the student's letter:

● VERSION in Student's own words

Dear Mr. Van Der Hoek,

We have recently received your call expressing concerns about rumors of our company's financial situation. That is why, I would be pleased to explain to you in this letter the current situation of IBM.

At IBM we are honest in everything we do. We recognize that the current times are challenging, but we are a brand with a long history, and we have overcome all kinds of obstacles.

In order to achieve the company's objectives, we are working on an innovative brand strategy. This plan consists of improving our customer service, expanding the service into

new countries and offering more promotions and discounts. In addition, we will invest in state-of-the-art technology and softwares, making it our competitive advantage in relation to other companies. Therefore, we are convinced that this strategy will help us to grow and solidify our presence in the market.

All in all, we are working hard on developing a new plan to ensure our company's growth and we will continue to improve ourselves to be able to offer you the best service. We cherish the trust that you have placed in our company, if you have any remaining questions or any other concern, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

I want to look at the following sentence: "We have recently received your call expressing concerns about rumors of our company's financial situation. That is why I would be pleased to explain the current situation of IBM." This version responded directly to the assignment prompt. When the student submitted it to ChatGPT, the AI suggested simplifying the sentence for clarity:
"Thank you for reaching out to us. I am pleased to provide an explanation of IBM's current financial situation."
In the final version, the student followed this suggestion, producing a clearer and more concise sentence:
"Thank you for reaching out to us. I am pleased to provide an explanation of IBM's current financial situation."

- **REVISION**

  Dear Mr. Van Der Hoek,

  We have recently received your call expressing concerns about rumors of our company's financial situation. Thank you for reaching out to us. I am pleased to provide an explanation of IBM's current financial situation in this letter.

  At IBM we are honest in everything we do. We recognize that the current times are challenging, but we are a brand with a long history, and we have overcome all kinds of obstacles.

  In order to achieve the company's objectives we are working on an innovative brand strategy that includes improving customer service, expanding our services into new countries, and offering more promotions and discounts. In addition, we will invest in state-of-the-art technology and software to gain a competitive advantage over other companies. Therefore, we are convinced that this strategy will help us to grow and solidify our presence in the market.
  All in all, we are working hard on developing a new plan to ensure our company's growth and we will continue to improve to be able to offer you the best service. We cherish the trust that you have placed in our company, if you have any remaining questions or any other concern, please feel free to contact us at your earliest convenience.

  Kind regards,

The student followed the assignment instructions, incorporating AI suggestions (highlighting) while retaining a substantial portion of her own writing. However, not all students followed this process. As I reviewed more letters, it became apparent that some students used AI to generate their "original" letter, which led to almost no revisions and minimal transparency in their submissions.

Addressing the Challenges of AI-Generated Text

The central challenge of assessing AI-integrated assignments lies in identifying the extent of AI involvement. Rather than focusing on whether students are using AI as a primary tool, it is more productive to design assignments strategically. For instance, tasks with more specific content that AI can easily generate are more susceptible to misuse, whereas reflective assignments based on personal experiences or knowledge can minimize over-reliance on AI.

Moreover, AI should be treated similarly to academic sources. Just as students are required to cite their references, they should also acknowledge their use of AI. By requiring students to sign a statement of integrity and disclose AI usage, educators can reinforce the importance of academic honesty. Failure to credit AI is akin to failing to cite a source properly, and both should be treated as opportunities for learning rather than grounds for immediate accusations of plagiarism.

Conclusion

As AI tools become more advanced and human-like, the challenge of detecting AI-generated content will only grow. While digital watermarks or other detection methods could provide temporary solutions, the deeper question lies in how we evaluate student work in this new hybrid writing environment. Should we grade all texts—human, AI, or hybrid—by the same standards? What does this mean for the role of the teacher and the development of the student's individual authorship? As AI continues to evolve, it is crucial that educators refine their assignment designs to foster genuine student input and engagement.

The official pilot of my Business English and AI course has finished, and as AI technology advances, so too will our methods of integrating and assessing its use in the classroom. The ultimate goal remains to equip students with the skills to use AI effectively and ethically, while maintaining the integrity of their own work.

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