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Original Paper

Generative AI and the Shaping of Academic Voice: Language, Normalization, and Epistemic Justice in AI-mediated Assessment

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Abstract

Despite the potential of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) to support research and academic production, attention must be paid to its implications for human learning and the development of voices and epistemologies in multilingual contexts. A central concern in critiques of GenAI is that language is frequently treated as a transparent medium, rather than as a site where biases and hierarchies are produced and reproduced by AI systems. This paper argues that GenAI intersects with existing hierarchies of academic knowledge production, assessment, and validation, especially in relation to the voices of multilingual authors. This study reports findings from an empirical analysis of academic writing produced by multilingual Master's students under contrasting assessment conditions: a restricted digital examination environment and an unrestricted setting with full access to online tools. Rather than seeking to detect AI use, the analysis examines how different assessment regimes shape register consistency, source integration, authorial voice and linguistic diversity. Findings suggest that unrestricted environments are associated with higher surface-level academic quality, but also with increased pressures toward normalization, potentially erasing linguistic diversity, weakening authorial voice and marginalizing alternative rhetorical and epistemic traditions. The paper concludes by advocating language-aware approaches to GenAI to enable epistemic justice and language diversity.

Keywords

Generative AI, academic writing, multilingualism, assessment, higher education, normalization

1. Introduction

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in general and Large Language Models (LLMs) in particular, are rapidly transforming knowledge production, academic writing, and pedagogical practices in higher

education (Crompton et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Universities across the world are struggling to make sense of and respond to AI-supported writing, feedback, and evaluation, often framing GenAI as a technological resource that enhances efficiency, access, and personalization while bringing risks to academic integrity. A growing body of scholarship foregrounds pedagogical affordances, including support for academic writing, expanded access to disciplinary genres, and increased learner autonomy. At the same time, critical research has increasingly challenged the presumed neutrality of these technologies, drawing attention to their entanglement with power, governance, data regimes, and historical inequalities produced across different contexts of use (Crawford, 2021; Selwyn, 2024; Finardi, in press; Finardi, 2025).

Recent critiques suggest that GenAI should not be understood as introducing an unprecedented crisis into otherwise stable academic systems, but rather as exposing long-standing tensions and contradictions within contemporary higher education (Stein, 2026). Writing in University World News, Dilkes and Daley (2026) argue that institutional responses to GenAI often reveal a desire to cling to an idealized vision of the modern university—one organized around compliance-based assessment, productivity, and credentialism. From this perspective, what is frequently framed as 'AI misuse' by students can instead be understood as a rational response to assessment systems that reward performance over learning. GenAI, in this sense, does not create new misalignments between assessment and learning, but makes existing ones more visible.

Despite the growing recognition that GenAI is trained in high resource languages and is embedded in broader institutional and political economies, many debates in higher education continue to treat language as a transparent medium rather than as a central site where inequalities are produced, legitimized, and contested. This omission is particularly consequential for multilingual academics who very often have to perform and produce in English to be recognized and included in international academic discourses (França, 2025). The global academic arena, in turn, is a site where language plays a key role in the quest for academic legitimacy and access to knowledge production and validation, often (re)producing the epistemic inequality and hierarchy involved in academic recognition (Bourdieu, 1991; Canagarajah, 2002, 2024; Díaz, 2018; Finardi, 2022a; Finardi, 2022b; França & Finardi, 2025). As such, GenAI does not enter a neutral academic field; rather, it intersects with evaluation regimes, publication metrics, and internationalization policies that already privilege knowledge from the Global North produced in English (Finardi et al., 2022; Finardi et al., 2023; França, 2025; Finardi & Helm, 2025; França & Finardi, 2025). Following Dados and Connell (2012), we understand the terms Global North and Global South not as fixed geographical entities, but as relational, historical, and geopolitical constructs shaped by enduring asymmetries in power, resources, and epistemic authority. From this perspective, the Global South refers to social locations, institutions, languages and knowledge systems that have been historically positioned as peripheral, dependent, or subordinate within global structures of capitalism, coloniality, and knowledge production, while the Global North occupies positions of relative privilege in theorizing and defining norms, standards, and criteria of legitimacy. It is important to note that forms of the Global

South exist within the Global North, and vice versa so that the definition of Global South/Global North depends on who is looking at what from where (e.g. Moore & Finardi, 2019; Finardi & Helm, 2025). In academic contexts, this relational inequality is particularly visible in regimes of evaluation, publication, and recognition that privilege English-mediated knowledge, Global North epistemologies, and standardized academic genres, while marginalizing alternative linguistic repertoires and ways of knowing and doing. Adopting this relational understanding allows the present study to examine GenAI not simply as a neutral technological innovation, but as a tool that enters and potentially intensifies pre-existing North–South asymmetries in academic voice, visibility, and epistemic legitimacy (Muldoon & Wu, 2023). Indeed, recent decolonial scholarship has further demonstrated that AI is embedded in what Quijano (2016) conceptualized as the colonial matrix of power. Drawing explicitly on this framework, Muldoon and Wu (2023) argue that AI systems are not merely affected by bias or uneven representation, but are structurally constituted through historical and ongoing relations of coloniality that organize global labor, resource extraction, and knowledge production. From this perspective, the apparent universality, neutrality, and objectivity attributed to AI technologies (and English) function as discursive mechanisms that obscure extractive practices and epistemic domination and 'pasteurization'. AI systems are developed through global supply chains that rely disproportionately on labor, data, and natural resources from the Global South, while their epistemic foundations remain anchored in Western rationality and Anglophone knowledge regimes. When applied to academic writing and knowledge production, this colonial logic is reproduced linguistically: GenAI systems trained primarily on English data and Global North academic corpora reinforce dominant rhetorical norms and marginalize alternative epistemologies, languages, and modes of meaning-making. Integrating Muldoon and Wu's (2023) analysis allows GenAI to be understood not simply as a technological intervention in higher education, but as part of a broader colonial infrastructure that governs whose knowledge is rendered visible, legitimate, and scalable in global academia.

Extending this relational understanding, the Global South can also be conceptualized linguistically and epistemically, rather than solely in geopolitical terms. Languages other than English—particularly those with lower global institutional visibility in academia may function as 'Global South languages' insofar as they are structurally marginalized within international regimes of knowledge production, circulation, and validation. These languages often carry epistemologies, rhetorical traditions, and ways of knowing that are rendered less legitimate in international English-dominated academic spaces. As knowledge is translated, mediated, or reformulated into English, epistemic assumptions embedded in other languages may be selectively filtered, simplified, or erased, resulting in what has been described as epistemic loss, myopia (Diniz de Figueiredo & Martinez, 2021) or distortion. From this perspective, linguistic hierarchies operate as epistemic hierarchies: privileging English not only privileges a language, but also the worldviews, argumentative logics, and ontologies most readily articulated through it. Understanding non-English languages as occupying a Global South position within global academia therefore

foregrounds how linguistic dominance shapes whose knowledge travels, whose voices are amplified, and which epistemologies are recognized as scientific, rigorous, or universal.

Having laid out this panorama, this article argues that GenAI is fundamentally a linguistic and epistemic technology. By drawing on vast corpora dominated by English and high-resource academic contexts, GenAI systems reproduce and amplify dominant rhetorical norms, stylistic conventions, and forms of argumentation that align closely with Anglophone academic traditions. While such conventions may facilitate access to institutional recognition, they also function as mechanisms of normalization, filtering out alternative rhetorical styles, culturally situated forms of reasoning and knowledge, and non-Western epistemic traditions. In this sense, GenAI risks reinforcing epistemic injustice by rendering conformity to dominant norms increasingly invisible and algorithmically enforced (Crawford, 2021; Helm, 2025).

These dynamics must be understood as part of longer histories of epistemic dependency and linguistic domination. From this perspective, GenAI systems are largely trained on English-language data produced in or extracted from the Global South, while their development and theorization are concentrated in Global North. This configuration systematically underrepresents low-resource languages, diverse accents, and alternative knowledge systems, aligning with broader critiques of data colonialism and extractive digital infrastructures (Crawford, 2021).

Recent commentary by Sharon Stein (2026), known for her work on Coloniality in Higher Education, further complicates integrity-focused framings of GenAI use in higher education by situating student engagement with AI within wider existential, ecological, and epistemic crises. Stein argues that students' recourse to GenAI is rarely a matter of laziness or moral failure, but rather a pragmatic response to structural pressures, uncertainty, and the erosion of shared narratives about the value and legitimacy of higher education. From this standpoint, the intense institutional focus on policing AI use risks obscuring deeper questions about whose knowledge is valued, how legitimacy is produced, and how colonial foundations continue to shape academic evaluation practices.

Language has long played a central role in these dynamics. English operates as the dominant academic lingua franca (Jenkins, 2013), structuring access to publication, evaluation, and recognition (França, 2025). For multilingual scholars, academic writing in English is not merely a technical skill but a deeply affective and identity-laden practice, shaped by unequal power relations and expectations of legitimacy (Canagarajah, 2002, 2024; Surenthiran et al., 2026). These pressures are intensified in AI-mediated environments, where dominant rhetorical norms are not only institutionalized but algorithmically reproduced at scale.

Informed by Corbin et al.'s (2025) analysis of GenAI and assessment as a wicked problem, this study foregrounds language as one of the key sites where the complexity of AI-mediated higher education becomes visible. Depending on whether GenAI is framed institutionally as an integrity risk, an employability tool, or a workload solution, universities normalize very different and often inequitable linguistic expectations. As Dilkes and Daley (2026) note, attempts to 'AI-proof' assessment often reproduce the same instrumental logic that invites strategic AI use in the first place. From a wicked-

problem perspective, technical fixes and standardized policies cannot resolve these tensions, as interventions aimed at regulating AI use may simultaneously intensify normalization, erode authorial voice, and widen linguistic inequities.

Against this backdrop, the present article reports findings from an empirical analysis of academic writing produced by multilingual Master's students under contrasting assessment conditions: a restricted digital examination environment and an unrestricted setting with full access to online tools. Rather than seeking to detect GenAI use, the study examines how different assessment regimes shape register consistency, source integration, and authorial voice. By centering language as a site of power and by situating student writing of native speakers of other languages besides English within broader institutional and geopolitical contexts, the article contributes to ongoing debates on epistemic justice, language diversity, and the governance of GenAI in higher education.

2. Method

This study forms part of a broader international research project examining how GenAI intersects with language diversity, academic writing, and the geopolitics of knowledge production in higher education (Finardi, 2025). The present analysis focuses on a small-scale, in-depth comparison of academic writing produced by multilingual Master's students who are non-native speakers of English under contrasting assessment conditions. Rather than attempting to detect or quantify GenAI use, the study adopts a qualitative, language-aware approach that examines how institutional assessment regimes shape textual outcomes, authorial positioning, and perceptions of academic legitimacy.

Consistent with critical perspectives on GenAI in higher education, the methodological design is grounded in the assumption that student engagement with AI technologies cannot be meaningfully understood in isolation from the institutional, linguistic, and evaluative contexts in which it occurs. As Dilkes and Daley (2026) argue, practices often framed as "misuse" of GenAI may instead represent rational responses to assessment systems oriented toward compliance and performance. Similarly, Stein (2026) cautions against deficit-oriented interpretations of student behavior that obscure the structural pressures shaping academic participation. These insights inform the study's decision to focus on textual consequences and institutional conditions rather than on individual compliance or integrity.

2.1 Context and Participants

The data were collected from international Master's students enrolled in two English-medium courses on digital literacy and learning at a European university. Although the two courses had different content, their overall structure was similar, as both courses required students to engage critically with academic literature, participate in seminars and workshops, and apply theoretical perspectives related to digital literacy and learning in community participation. The written examination differed in format and context; however, both were designed to demonstrate students' ability to write academically. Written examination papers aligned with the course learning outcomes constituted the primary data source for analysis. The objective of this study was not to scrutinize the content of the two courses but rather to compare three

interrelated dimensions of academic writing: 1) register shifts, 2) source integration quality, and 3) voice consistency. These dimensions were examined as indicators of the degree of academic independence students demonstrated in their writing.

All participants used English as an additional language and as a lingua franca; none had English as their first language. The linguistic backgrounds of the eight students included Central Europe (1), East Asia (3), Northern Europe (3), Southeast Asia (1) Southern Europe (1). All participants were advanced Master's students with prior experience in academic writing in English and familiarity with academic genres and citation practices. The relatively small number of participants enabled close, comparative analysis of texts produced by the same individuals across different assessment conditions.

2.2 Examination Conditions and Institutional AI Policy

The two courses differed substantially in their examination formats and degrees of digital openness. In the first course, students completed their examination papers within a restricted time frame in a controlled digital environment. Access was limited to a word processor, with no internet connection and no access to external digital tools. In contrast, the second course allowed home-based writing with unrestricted time and full access to the internet and digital resources.

University-wide AI policy guidelines permitted the use of GenAI tools for surface-level language support, such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation, but prohibited their use for content generation, restructuring, or stylistic revision. These latter uses were defined as academic misconduct. Classroom workshop activities and informal student discussions indicated that all participants had prior experience using ChatGPT or similar tools, reflecting broader patterns of GenAI uptake in higher education.

Rather than treating these contrasting examination conditions as neutral methodological variables, the study conceptualizes them as institutional choices with concrete equity implications for multilingual writers. As Corbin et al. (2025) argue, assessment in AI-mediated contexts constitutes a wicked problem, in which interventions are shaped by how the problem itself is framed. Integrity-oriented framings tend to privilege restriction and surveillance, while employability-oriented framings privilege access to AI-mediated textual polish. Both approaches produce distinct and often uneven consequences for multilingual students' ability to perform academic legitimacy.

2.3 Analytical Approach

The study employed a qualitative register consistency analysis informed by academic discourse studies and genre analysis (Swales, 1990). Texts produced by the same students under restricted and unrestricted examination conditions were compared in order to examine how different assessment regimes shape textual outcomes and authorial positioning.

The analysis focused on three interrelated dimensions:

1. register shifts, defined as abrupt changes in academic style, polish, or formality within or across texts;
2. source integration quality, including how sources were paraphrased, cited, and embedded in the author's argument; and

3. voice consistency, referring to the stability of authorial presence, stance-taking, and argumentative coherence across sections of the text.

These dimensions were selected because they are particularly salient for advanced Master's students, who are generally familiar with disciplinary conventions but may experience heightened pressure to perform linguistic and rhetorical legitimacy in high-stakes assessment contexts. Rather than attempting to infer whether GenAI was used in specific textual segments, the analysis examined how textual features varied systematically across assessment regimes. This approach aligns with Corbin et al.'s (2025) observation that GenAI-related assessment lacks reliable tests of solution success and that attempts to police AI use often generate uncertainty and inequity rather than clarity.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The study followed institutional and national ethical guidelines for educational research. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of their written contributions, and participation was voluntary. In accordance with institutional policy, the use of assessed coursework did not require written informed consent. Participation had no impact on assessment outcomes or academic standing. All data were anonymized, and identifying information was removed prior to analysis.

Given the sensitivity of using assessment data and the contested nature of GenAI in higher education, particular care was taken to avoid deficit-oriented interpretations of student writing. The analysis focused on textual features and institutional conditions rather than on individual competence or compliance. Consistent with a Global South and decolonial ethical stance, students are positioned as epistemic agents navigating unequal academic, linguistic, and digital environments, rather than as subjects to be monitored or sanctioned. The study seeks to contribute to more language-aware, just, and context-sensitive approaches to GenAI governance and assessment in higher education.

3. Results

Overall, examination papers written under unrestricted conditions demonstrated higher surface-level academic quality than those produced in the restricted examination environment. All eight papers written with unrestricted time and access to digital resources were assessed as high quality, whereas only two of the papers written under restricted conditions reached a comparable level. The remaining six restricted-environment texts met the minimum academic requirements of the course learning outcomes but displayed uneven development in argumentation, linguistic refinement, and textual coherence.

Student evaluation meetings highlighted time as a central constraining factor in the restricted examination environment, particularly in relation to elaboration, revision, and linguistic refinement. Several students reported feeling that restricted conditions limited their ability to demonstrate what they 'really knew,' especially in a second language. At the same time, students expressed concerns about fairness and comparability across examination conditions, noting uncertainty about how linguistic polish and AI-mediated support might influence evaluation outcomes. Some participants reported believing that peers

had used ChatGPT or similar tools for textual refinement in the unrestricted setting, raising questions about legitimacy, effort, and assessment equity.

These concerns reflect what Dilkes and Daley (2026) describe as the misalignment between assessment systems oriented toward performance and students' experiences of learning under increasingly instrumental conditions. Rather than indicating a lack of academic integrity, students' uncertainty and strategic reasoning point to heightened awareness of how legitimacy is performed and evaluated within what they perceived as uneven institutional rules.

Across the dataset, three recurring textual patterns were identified: register shifts, source integration quality, and voice consistency. These patterns are reported below as interrelated dimensions of how assessment regimes shape academic writing in AI-mediated contexts.

3.1 Register Shifts and the Performance of Academic Legitimacy

Register shifts were most evident in texts produced under restricted examination conditions. These texts frequently displayed abrupt changes in level of formality, abstraction, and lexical density, often occrurring in close proximity to cited material. In several cases, passages written in a personal, reflective, or explanatory student voice were followed by highly polished, generalized academic formulations. Such shifts disrupted textual cohesion and, in some instances, obscured the author's argumentative trajectory. One example of an abrupt register shift involves movement from relatively formal expression to a more informal, spoken-like formulation, as in "More than that, it's not longer about standard skills". Similarly, oscillating between descriptions and normative advice, such as the use of formulations like "people should be able to", introduced inconsistencies in rhetoric stance. Univen levels of formality were also evident across paragraphs, with occasional adoption of a conversational register, for instance through repeated use of evaluative adverbs such as, "infortunately" and "undoubtedly". Furthermore, the frequent use of long, loosely structured sentences contributed to rhetorical enthusiasm rather than academic argumentation.

In contrast, papers written under unrestricted conditions generally exhibited more gradual and consistent register development across sections. Stylistic alignment was maintained throughout the text, and transitions between discussion and citation were smoother. At a surface level, these texts more closely approximated dominant expectations of academic writing, including sustained formality, consistent hedging, and standardized argumentative structure.

However, this apparent improvement in register consistency also reflects intensified pressures toward normalization. In unrestricted environments, students had greater opportunity to revise, align, and polish their texts in ways that conformed to dominant academic norms. While this resulted in higher perceived quality, it also reduced visible traces of linguistic struggle, experimentation, or rhetorical hybridity. From a knowledge-factory perspective (Dilkes & Daley, 2026), such normalization can be understood as a form of performative legitimacy, where textual conformity becomes a proxy for academic competence.

3.2 Source Integration and Epistemic Positioning

Differences between examination conditions were evident in how students integrated academic sources. In higher-quality papers, predominantly those produced under unrestricted conditions, sources were generally paraphrased conceptually, integrated into the author's argument, and explicitly mediated through evaluative language. In these texts, citations functioned as resources for meaning-making rather than as external authorities, allowing students to position themselves as active knowledge producers.

In contrast, weaker texts, more commonly observed in the restricted examination environment, displayed clustered citations, limited paraphrasing, and formulations closely aligned with source texts. In some cases, this resulted in borderline patchwriting, where the author's voice receded behind the cited material. Uneven source integration was particularly evident when sources were not analytically unpacked to support the author's argument, but instead were used to confirm points already being made. Another recurring pattern involved presentation of citations across paragraphs without connections between them. At times, sources appeared to be used to validate general claims rather than actively shaping the argument, especially when paraphrasing was close to the original wording.

These patterns are consistent with time-pressured writing conditions, particularly for multilingual authors, but they also reflect broader evaluative expectations that reward citation density and formal alignment over epistemic engagement.

Importantly, unrestricted access to digital tools appears to facilitate more fluent source integration, but it may also encourage alignment with dominant epistemic norms. AI-mediated paraphrasing and summarization tools, even when used within policy boundaries, can subtly shape how sources are framed, privileging linear argumentation, generalized claims, and standardized academic phrasing. As a result, while source integration improves at a surface level, opportunities for alternative epistemic positioning may be constrained.

3.3 Voice Consistency and Normalization Effects

Voice consistency was strongest in papers where authors sustained a coherent analytical stance and developed arguments progressively across sections. These texts positioned students as reflective participants in scholarly dialogue, rather than as passive transmitters of theory. Such consistency was more common in unrestricted examination contexts, where students had time and resources to revise and align their texts.

By contrast, papers written under restricted conditions often exhibited fragmented voice, with shifts between summarizing, reporting, and analysis that were not fully integrated. In the data, this was evident when author adopted a confident stance, such as assrting what "workers need to do", before retreating into more neutral descriptive formulations. This can make it difficult to track a sustained argumentative line. Cohesion across paragraphs was also relatively weak: while key concepts recurred (e.g., "human–machine cooperation" and "social dimensions of literacy"), they were not consistently developed.

In these cases, authorial stance remained implicit or uneven, and students were positioned primarily as reporters of established knowledge. These patterns reflect the cognitive and linguistic demands of writing

under time pressure in an additional language, but they also highlight how assessment regimes shape whose voice is recognized as legitimate.

While unrestricted environments supported stronger voice consistency, they also intensified pressures toward homogenization. Several students described AI-generated or AI-assisted academic texts as "safe," and "neutral," suggesting that achieving voice consistency often involved suppressing idiosyncratic expression in favor of standardized academic tone. This aligns with Stein's (2026) observation that AI use often reflects pragmatic adaptation to institutional expectations rather than disengagement from learning. In such contexts, voice is stabilized not through epistemic confidence alone, but through alignment with algorithmically reinforced norms of academic legitimacy.

3.4 Summary of Results

Taken together, the findings indicate that unrestricted environments with online access to GenAI are associated with higher surface-level academic quality, greater register consistency, and more fluent source integration. At the same time, these environments intensify normalization pressures that may weaken authorial voice and marginalize alternative rhetorical and epistemic traditions.

Students' engagement with AI-supported writing must therefore be understood within broader institutional and structural conditions. For the multilingual students in this study, highly skilled individuals operating in a second language, recourse to AI-mediated support represents a rational strategy for navigating time constraints, linguistic insecurity, and uneven assessment expectations. As Dilkes and Daley (2026) argue, when assessment systems prioritize performance over process, strategic adaptation becomes a logical response.

Rather than framing these practices as integrity failures, the results point to a deeper tension between assessment regimes, linguistic diversity, and epistemic justice. GenAI does not simply improve or degrade academic writing; it reshapes how academic legitimacy is performed, evaluated, and normalized within contemporary higher education.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that GenAI-supported writing environments were associated with increased surface-level academic quality, i.e. writing that better matches what current assessment systems tend to reward, while also increasing pressure to conform to standardized academic discourse. For multilingual students, this often means adopting dominant rhetorical conventions and stylistic norms aligned with Anglophone academic traditions. While such conventions may facilitate acceptance within institutional assessment regimes, they also risk weaken authorial voice and marginalizing rhetorical and epistemic diversity.

Importantly, these patterns are better explained by institutional conditions than by individual shortcomings. Multilingual students' practical use of GenAI reflects a response to time constraints and linguistic insecurity within structurally unequal academic systems. In this sense, GenAI functions less as

a neutral writing aid and more as a mediating technology that shapes how academic legitimacy is performed, evaluated, and recognized.

In Dilkes and Daley's (2026) terms, these findings fit the "knowledge factory" model of the contemporary university. In such a model, assessment practices prioritize efficiency, standardization, and measurable outputs. In that context, aligning with dominant academic norms, through time-intensive revision or AI-mediated textual refinement, becomes a rational strategy meeting expectations. GenAI does not create this logic but renders it more visible and more efficient, accelerating processes of normalization already embedded in higher education.

The results also resonate strongly with Stein's (2026) critique of integrity-focused framings of GenAI use. Stein argues that students' engagement with AI should be understood in relation to broader uncertainty and instability in higher education. In this study, students' concerns about fairness, comparability, and legitimacy across assessment conditions reflect their awareness of how fragile and inconsistent academic evaluation systems can be. When surface-level textual quality becomes a proxy for competence, multilingual students face a double bind: they are expected to meet standardized linguistic expectations while being restricted from the very tools that can help them.

Viewed through Corbin et al.'s (2025) wicked-problem framework, challenges around GenAI and assessment cannot be solved through technical fixes or stricter policies. Integrity-oriented responses often rely on surveillance, restriction, and detection, which can increase student anxiety and reinforce deficit views of multilingual writers. Employability-oriented approaches privilege alignment with dominant academic and professional genres, treating AI-mediated textual polish as a form of capital needed to succeed in global labor markets. Workload-driven approaches emphasize efficiency and automation, which can limit opportunities for writing as a process of epistemic development. Each of these approaches leads to different and and often unequal consequences for linguistic diversity, authorial voice, and epistemic justice.

From a language-as-power perspective, the findings underscore that GenAI is not merely a technical aid for writing but a linguistic and epistemic technology embedded in broader regimes of internationalization, evaluation, and knowledge production. By reproducing dominant academic registers at scale, GenAI risk accelerating long-standing processes of linguistic homogenization. In AI-mediated writing environments, conformity to dominant norms may become less visible, algorithmically enforced, and difficult to challenge, particularly for multilingual scholars whose linguistic repertoires do not fully align with standardized academic English.

The humanities-oriented arguments highlighted by Myklebust (2026) provide an important counterpoint. The loss of voice, nuance, and contextual sensitivity in 'pasteurized', highly normalized academic texts points to what is at stake when academic writing is reduced to a technical skill. Practices such as close reading, independent writing, and developing arguments sensitive to context are central to epistemic agency and democratic participation. When GenAI-mediated writing prioritizes fluency and polish over

meaning-making, the risk is not simply linguistic uniformity but narrowing what counts as knowledge itself.

When viewed from the perspective of 'Global South languages', these dynamics become even more pressing. GenAI systems are trained predominantly on English-language data from Global North contexts, which means they carry specific assumptions about what counts as valid knowledge, appropriate argumentation, and good academic writing. For multilingual students and scholars who work in or through 'Global South languages' (Note 1) AI- support can both reduce linguistic barriers and increase dependence on dominant academic norms. While GenAI can assist users navigating academic genres, it can also further marginalize alternative ways of thinking, arguing, and writing that fall outside algorithmically reinforced norms.

The findings also challenge simplistic views of GenAI as either a threat to academic integrity or a solution to educational inequity. Such framings obscure the complex ways in which GenAI intersects with language hierarchies, institutional power, and global inequalities. A more productive approach is to recognize both sides at once: GenAI can offer real practical support for multilingual writers, but it also carries structural risks for linguistic diversity and epistemic plurality if its use is left unexamined.

Taken together, the discussion brought to bear in this article suggests that more just approaches to GenAI governance in higher education must be language-aware, context-sensitive, and grounded in an understanding of inequality as structurally produced rather than individually enacted. Rather than asking whether students should or should not use GenAI, the critical question becomes how institutions design assessment practices, AI policies, and pedagogical environments that recognize multilingual writers as epistemic agents that can resist the further consolidation of Anglophone academic authority and AI 'pasteurization' of knowledge.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that GenAI does more than simply support academic writing in higher education but actively reshapes what counts as legitimate academic discourse. By foregrounding language as a central site of power, the analysis shows how AI-mediated writing environments intersect with existing regimes of assessment, internationalization, and academic legitimacy. Rather than entering a neutral educational landscape, GenAI reinforces long-standing linguistic hierarchies and epistemic inequalities by favoring dominant academic styles and Anglophone norms through processes of algorithmic standardization.

The comparison of multilingual students' writing under restricted and unrestricted assessment conditions reveals a central tension. Writing produced in assessment contexts with greater access to digital resources, within existing institutional AI plicies, tended to show higher surface-level academic quality. At the same time, these contexts intensified pressures to conform in style, voice, and epistemic positioning. For multilingual writers, this creates a paradox: GenAI can facilitate access to dominant academic expectations while at the same time limiting rhetorical diversity and weakening authorial voice. These

findings challenge narratives that frame GenAI as either a neutral tool or as a threat to academic integrity, instead positioning it as a mediating technology embedded in unequal institutional and geopolitical structures.

From a critical perspective, these dynamics have serious implications. As GenAI is trained predominantly on English-language data from Global North contexts, it tends to reproduce long-standing inequalities in whose knowledge is visible, valued, and recognized as legitimate. While GenAI can help reduce some linguistic barriers, it can also increase dependence on dominant academic norms of argumentation and academic expression. Without careful attention to language and power, efforts to promote inclusion through AI may end up creating new forms of exclusion alongside old ones.

The findings also resonate with broader critiques of the contemporary university as a "knowledge factory" oriented toward efficiency, standardization, and performative legitimacy (Dilkes & Daley, 2026). In this context, students' strategic use of GenAI is better understood not as an ethical failure but as a response to assessment regimes that prioritize product over process. Similarly, Stein's (2026) analysis invites a reframing of AI-related concerns away from narrow debates about cheating and toward deeper questions about epistemic authority, colonial inheritances, and the erosion of shared narratives of academic value. GenAI, in this sense, functions less as the cause of crisis than as a tool that makes existing structural tensions more visible.

Importantly, the study challenges deficit-oriented views of multilingual students' writing and AI use. Rather than seeing students a as passive recipients of technology or as integrity risks, the analysis presents them as epistemic agents navigating time pressure, linguistic insecurity, and uneven assessment conditions. Recognizing this agency shifts attention away from individual compliance and toward institutional design. If assessment practices reward surface-level polish while marginalizing voice, experimentation, and epistemic plurality, GenAI will inevitably need to be used to meet those expectations.

The article calls for language-aware and justice-oriented approaches to GenAI governance in higher education. Such approaches must move beyond technocratic solutions and integrity surveillance to address how assessment design, AI policy frameworks, and pedagogical practices shape academic voice and knowledge production. This entails treating academic writing as a humanistic and epistemic practice rather than a purely technical skill, valuing linguistic diversity as a resource rather than a deficit, and resisting the further standardization of academic writing in AI-mediated environments.

Future research should extend this work across disciplines, institutional contexts, and linguistic settings, particularly in underrepresented environments and languages. More attention is needed to understand how GenAI reshapes academic writing, assessment, and epistemic inclusion. Without sustained critical focus on language and power, GenAI may reinforce the same inequalities it is often claimed to mitigate. With such attention, however, it may become possible to imagine more plural, inclusive, and socially just futures for academic writing and higher education.

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Note

Note 1. And this includes English from Global South contexts.