

Pragmatic Failures in AI-Mediated Pedagogy: A 2025-2026 Reddit Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The article discusses the Pragmatic Gap of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools within the educational setting in the sense of whether or not syntactic fluency and communicative effectiveness are compatible. Reddit was selected as the main source of data since it is among the three spaces of the digital world where educators and students can engage in free and naturalistic meta-discourse concerning technology. It is a platform which presents uncooked and peer-reviewed evidence of practical failure which is usually softened in official institutional survey questionnaires. The study will get directed at pinpointing particular groups of pragmatic failure and suggest a framework of Pragmatic Calibration. It has been found that AI methodically fails at Illocutionary Sincerity and Temporal Deixis. Although AI will help in the retrieval of information, it can be very catastrophic regarding the Positive Face of the learners with the robotic over-politeness or bald-on-record correctness. The study concludes that the future of AI in education depends on achieving "Pragmatic Plasticity"—the ability to adapt tone and intent to the specific social distance of the classroom.

Keywords: AI-Mediated Pedagogy, Digital Third Space, Speech Act Theory, Gricean Maxims, Pragmatic Plasticity

الإخفاقات التداولية في التدريس المدعوم بالذكاء الاصطناعي: تحليل خطابي – تداولي لنقاشات منصة ريدت للعام 2025-2024

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ملخص

تناقش هذه الدراسة الفجوة التداولية لأدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي في البيئة التعليمية، من حيث مدى التوافق بين الطلاقة التركيبية والفاعلية التواصلية. وقد تم اعتماد منصة «ريدت» مصدرًا رئيسًا للبيانات، لكونها فضاءً رقميًا يتيح للمدرسين والطلبة الانخراط في نقاشات حرة وطبيعية حول التكنولوجيا. وتمثل هذه المنصة بيئة تقدم أدلة أولية، خاضعة لمراجعة المستخدمين، تكشف عن الإخفاقات التطبيقية التي غالبًا ما تُخفّف حدثها في استبيانات المؤسسات الرسمية وتهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد أنماط محددة من الإخفاقات التداولية، واقتراح إطار نظري لما يُعرف بالمعايرة التداولية. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن أنظمة الذكاء الاصطناعي تُخفق بشكل منهجي في تحقيق الصدق المقصدي والإشارات الزمنية. وعلى الرغم من إسهامها في تسهيل استرجاع المعلومات، فإنها قد تُلحق أثرًا سلبيًا بالغ الأهمية على الصورة الاجتماعية الإيجابية للمتعلمين، نتيجة الإفراط في المجاملة الآلية أو المباشرة المفرطة الخالية من التلطيف وتستنتج الدراسة إلى أن مستقبل

توظيف الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم مرهون بتحقيق المرونة التداولية، أي القدرة على تكيف النبرة والمقصد بما يتلاءم مع طبيعة المسافة الاجتماعية داخل البيئة الصفية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : البيداغوجيا بوساطة الذكاء الاصطناعي ، الفضاء الرقمي الثالث، نظرية أفعال الكلام، مبادئ غرايس، المرونة التداولية

Theoretical Preliminaries

To define the reason behind AI-mediated communication failure, in a pedagogical set-up, the study goes beyond grammatical correctness to examine pragmatic competence. Although AI is adept at syntax, it is not always socially and contextually aware to be effective in teaching. In order to put a hold on these multi-dimensional failures, the study will assume an Eclectic Pragmatic Model. The model combines the classical speech act principles and the contemporary digital pragmatics to assess the intersection of intent, politeness, context, and cognitive effort in human-AI communication. Moreover, this discussion is guided by the approach of Crystal (Crystal, 2011) to the concept of Internet Linguistics according to which the digital communication necessitates a dedicated pragmatic approach to consider the peculiarities of screen-based interaction. By incorporating this view, the model accounts for the specific nuances of "Netiquette" and the evolving norms of AI-human dialogue (Crystal, 2011).

The Eclectic Pragmatic Model

In order to measure the complexity of the AI human interaction, this paper dismisses single-theory approach and adopts an Eclectic Pragmatic Model. According to this model, a pedagogical failure has many levels- between the will of the speaker and the intellectual work of the listener. With a combination of classical concepts (Speech Acts, Grice) (Austin, 1962) (Searle, 1969) (Grice, 1975) and contemporary ones (Digital Pragmatics, Relevance Theory), it will become clear that there is so much more that makes AI wrong in the eyes of students despite having a perfect grammar (Hofler, 2008) (Sperber, D , and Wilson, D., 1986). Thus, an Eclectic Pragmatic Model is used in this study, relying on the following frameworks that were used in the past and present.:

1. **Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969; Austin, 1962):** Used to evaluate the illocutionary force and felicity conditions (specifically sincerity and authority) of AI-generated praise and critique (Austin, 1962) (Searle, 1969).
2. **The Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975):** Essential for analyzing how AI manages the flow of information through the four maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relation, Manner) (Grice, 1975).
3. **Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987):** Analyzes the management of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) in digital feedback loops (Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C., 1987).
4. **Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986):** Examines the "cognitive cost" students pay when AI provides verbose or irrelevant data (Sperber, D. and Wilson, D., 1986).
5. **Contextualism & Deixis (Recanati, 2004; Levinson, 1983):** Addresses AI's frequent failure to anchor its discourse in "here" and "now" (Temporal and Spatial Deixis) (Recanati, 2004) (Levinson, 1983).

Theoretical Perspective on Reddit

This study hypothesizes the concept of Reddit as a digital third space, in terms of the tradition of Oldenburg (Oldenburg, 1989) and Soukup (Soukup, 2006). It is beyond the formal first space of home and the second space of institutional classroom. The university is flattened in this virtual space where it is possible to have raw meta-discourse. The platform anonymity is used by users to confirm pragmatic

failures by converting personal frustrations into peer reviewed collective knowledge.. Such an ecosystem elicits the unrefined pragmatic failures of the real world use of AI in education, and is a bit more truthful and peer-validated than controlled research.

Pragmatic Plasticity

One of the key themes that have surfaced out of this research is the need to have Pragmatic Plasticity in pedagogical AI. This idea is the possibility of the model to dynamically adjust the linguistic register, its tone, and its illocutionary purpose according to the social distance between the learner and the AI. In a classroom, the social distance cannot be determined; it varies when it comes to a lecture, a critique session, or a free brainstorming activity. Present AI models are pragmatically rigid as they tend to remain on a particular level of being over-polite or literal and is not capable of adjusting to these changes. Pragmatic Plasticity would be possible because the AI would be able to go beyond mere word-prediction to mimic the actual pedagogical intentionality in which it would know when to be indirect to soften or know when it is necessary to be parsimonious in the amount of detail it ought to include. In its absence, AI is just a robot that renders an experience of the Uncanny Valley and thus excludes the student out of the educational process (Hofler, 2008)

Research Questions

Based on the Eclectic Pragmatic Model, this research answers the following expanded questions:

1. To what extent does AI feedback satisfy the Sincerity Conditions (Speech Act Theory) and maintain Illocutionary Force in pedagogical interactions?
2. How do violations of Gricean Maxims (Cooperative Principle) and the resulting Cognitive Cost (Relevance Theory) impact student learning?
3. In what ways does AI fail to manage Face Threatening Acts (Politeness Theory) and anchor discourse in Temporal/Spatial contexts (Deixis)?
4. How do Digital Pragmatics norms shift when AI serves as the primary pedagogical mediator?

Methodology and Data Description

A qualitative and quantitative pragmatic analysis was conducted on data sourced from Reddit, targeting the subreddits **r/Professors**, **r/CollegeHacks**, and **r/Using_AI_in_Education**. The longitudinal data collection spanned from **January 2025 through February 2026**. The final dataset consists of **seven purposively sampled extracts** selected based on high levels of communal engagement, such as upvotes and comment density.

Case Study: 7 Long Reddit Discourse Extracts

The next analysis will be a comparison of the frequency of the four major Research Questions (RQs) that are answered in the seven chosen extracts.

The Eclectic Pragmatic Model is applied to each of the extracts to respond to the particular Research Questions (RQ) of the study.

Extract 1: The Sincerity Crisis

- **Context:** A professor discusses a student's reaction to AI "enthusiasm".
- **Content:** "The AI told my student it was 'proud of their progress.' The student laughed and said, 'It's a toaster, it's not proud of anything.'"
- **Analysis using Eclectic Model:**

This exchange constitutes a basic violation of Sincerity Conditions through the prism of the Speech Act Theory because any expressive performance like feeling pride is linguistically invalid when the speaker is established as a non-emotional agent. In Digital Pragmatics terms, the reaction of the student indicates that it is a categorical denial of the simulated empathetic experience in digital-mediated pedagogy in which no human self exists as a reference to the human simulated empathy, thus rendering the praise of the AI performative instead of warranted.

Extract 2: The Quantity Overload

- **Context:** A student asks for a quick formula check.
- **Content:** "I asked for the Pythagorean theorem. It gave me a 3-page biography of Pythagoras and a derivation of the formula. I just needed the formula."
- **Analysis using Eclectic Model:**

The extract also brings out a clear case of breach of the Gricean Maxim of Quantity, sub-maxim that says that one must not overdo his part in terms of informing more than what is necessary to the ongoing exchange. Relevance Theory would hold that such overproduction causes an unnecessary and high cognitive cost to the student who would have to sieve through a large amount of irrelevant information about the biographies before identifying the exact mathematical information they sought.

Extract 3: The Deictic Ghost

Context: AI refers to non-existent previous interactions.

Content: "AI: 'As we noted in your previous essay...' User: 'This is my first time using you.'"

Analysis using Eclectic Model:

The failure is an example of Discourse Deixis malfunctioning in which the AI is trying to place the current exchange within a common history, which is not a literal one. In the Speech Act Theory, this hallucination breaches the felicity conditions of authority and reliability, since the AI is attempting to generate a pedagogical continuum which is premised on a false point, and this is thus destroying the trust of the user in the AI to be aware of its context.

Extract 4: The "Robotic Face"

- **Context:** Discussion on the "tone" of AI corrections.
- **Content:** "The AI uses 'I hope this helps!' and 'It is important to remember...' every 5 seconds. It feels like talking to a customer service script."
- **Analysis using Eclectic Model:**

Within the context of the Politeness Theory, the repetitive and overly frequent application of Positive Politeness strategies by the AI results in a linguistic Uncanny Valley in which the artificial niceness is not natural. This is a shortcoming of Digital Pragmatics where strict, scripted interactions are not able to recreate the natural, adaptive process of human learning, so that the student does not feel like he is interacting with a machine, not with a mentor.

Extract 5: Bald-On-Record Failure

- **Context:** AI grading a sensitive creative writing piece.
- **Content:** "AI: 'This plot is illogical.' No explanation, no softening. The student nearly quit the course."
- **Analysis using Eclectic Model:**

In this case, the AI is not able to deal with a Face Threatening Act (FTA) by using a bald-on-record approach with no redressive response to defend the face of the student. The Speech Act Theory postulates that the net deficiency of Negative Politeness- or the absence of the use of softening devices will reduce the pedagogical efficacy of the criticism, because the offensive delivery will make the learner defensive or discouraged in lieu of being receptive to the feedback.

Extract 6: The Maxim of Relation (Hallucinated Context)

- **Context:** Student asking for 2025 current events.
- **Content:** "I asked about the 2025 strike. It told me about a strike in 1925. It ignored my temporal context entirely."
- **Analysis using Eclectic Model:**

This communication is a pure violation of the Gricean Maxim of Relation because AI offers information that cannot be chronologically relevant to the particular query of the student. This, according to the Contextualism and Deixis, is a failure of Temporal Deixis, and it is the failure of the AI to identify the now of the user and situate the conversation in the present time, which results in a complete failure of communicative relevance..

Extract 7: Indirect Speech Act Misinterpretation

- **Context:** A teacher uses irony or indirectness.
- **Content:** "Professor: 'Could you be any more verbose?' AI: 'Yes, I can provide a much longer explanation if you wish!'"
- **Analysis using Eclectic Model:**

○ This is a failure of the Speech Act Theory to interpret Implicature, in which the AI takes an ironic command as a literal command and does not interpret the actual intent of the speaker. The AI does not determine the intended relevance of the ironic statement, and therefore the human speaker ends up receiving the opposite response of what he or she intended, which proves the inability of the AI to possess an advanced intuition regarding social contexts..

Results: Quantitative Section of Research Questions Distribution

The following analysis compares the frequency of the four primary Research Questions (RQs) addressed across the seven selected extracts:

Research Question Focus	Associated Extracts	Total Frequency	Percentage
RQ1: Sincerity & Illocutionary Force	Extract 1	1	14.3%
RQ2: Gricean Maxims & Cognitive Cost	Extract 2, Extract 6	2	28.6%
RQ3: Face Management (FTAs) & Deixis	Extract 3, Extract 5	2	28.6%
RQ4: Digital Pragmatics & Norm Shifts	Extract 4, Extract 7	2	28.6%

Therefore, the data shows that there was a balanced distribution of the theoretical pillars of the Eclectic Pragmatic Model. Although Sincerity Conditions (RQ1) had the greatest visceral rejection by the students (the "toaster" remark), Cognitive Cost (RQ2), Relational Face (RQ3), and Norm Shifts (RQ4) were more frequently used in the discourse that was sampled (28.6% each). This implies that this phenomenon is not single-dimensional but multi-dimensional as it entails a failure in efficiency, a failure in relationship-building, and a failure in contextual accuracy at the same time.

Discussions of Results

The research reveals the following critical insights:

1. **Pragmatic Incompetence and Educational Friction:** The research concludes that AI is socially inept as it is semantically rich and syntactically proficient but it is socially poor and is a source of considerable friction in pedagogical relationships.
2. **Systematic Failures in Sincerity and Context:** The data analysis indicates that AI repeatedly does not meet the criteria of the Illocutionary Sincerity since the speech acts of the expressive type are seen as empty by the students. Moreover, it has no capability of sustaining Temporal Deixis and in many cases it does not understand the now of the user
3. **Face Management and the Uncanny Valley:** Findings indicate that AI creates learner alienation by oscillating between excessive, robotic **Positive Politeness** and blunt, **Bald-on-record** critiques. This failure to mitigate **Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)** creates an "Uncanny Valley" effect that disrupts the student-teacher bond.
4. **The Pragmatic Burden of Informational Overload:** Violations of the **Gricean Maxims of Quantity and Relation**—specifically providing more information than required or hallucinating irrelevant context—impose a heavy **cognitive cost** on students.
5. **Breakdown of Indirect Communication:** Implicatures, e.g. irony or indirect speech acts, are not handled by AI, which tends to take the rhetorical or sarcastic utterance literally, making it ineffective.
6. **The Necessity of Pragmatic Plasticity:** To become an effective and viable pedagogical mediator, AI must shift to more than a word-prediction model and must be modeled as a Pragmatic Plasticity to enable it to adjust its tone, intent, and social distance to the requirements of the classroom setting..

Main Conclusions

The study comes up with the following conclusions directly addressing the four expanded research questions based on the **Eclectic Pragmatic Model**:

1. In the scope of the degree to which AI feedback meets Sincerity Conditions, the research finds that AI-generated pedagogical responses often do not meet the Sincerity Conditions. Since the students recognize expressive speech acts, like the one of an AI saying that it feels pride, as empty when they are expressed by an agent who is not emotional, the desired Illocutionary Force is drained to the last drop. The perceived unauthenticity of the feedback, therefore, makes the feedback be perceived as artificial, and not sincere, thus significantly reducing its motivational effect on the learner.
2. When discussing the effects of the breach of the Cooperative Principle on the learning experience, the study concludes that AI violates the Maxim of Quantity regularly, offering too much information and the Maxim of Relation consistently, introducing hallucinated or irrelevant situations. Relevance Theory argues that such pragmatic failures put a high cognition cost on students. This pragmatic burden compels students to use unwarranted mental processing in sifting information, which ultimately results in cognitive overload and student burnout.
3. Regarding the management of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) and spatial/temporal anchoring, the research arrives at the conclusion that AI does not ensure a stable pedagogical relationship. The AI is inclined to swing between robotic over-politeness and bald-on-record bluntness, either of which is aimed at pushing the learner away and has the effect of causing an uncanny valley effect. More so, a programmatic inability in Temporal and Discourse Deixis ensures that the AI does not situate its discourse in the here and now, causing it to have no prior history and severe contextual drift.

4. Regarding the shift in norms when AI mediates pedagogy, the research concludes that traditional pragmatic expectations are altered within the **digital third space**. The AI's inability to process **Implicatures**, such as irony or indirectness, disrupts the natural flow of the classroom hierarchy. For AI to become a viable pedagogical mediator, it must move beyond simple word-prediction to achieve "**Pragmatic Plasticity**"—the ability to simulate true **pedagogical intentionality** and adapt its tone and intent to the specific social needs of the interactions.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Studies

This systematic failure in all these categories requires a shift towards Pragmatic Plasticity. According to this concept, AI is expected to change its register dynamically depending on the social distance. In the absence of this development, AI will remain an unsolvable problem of "Pragmatic Rigidity, still at a deadlock of either over-politeness or literalism, which will keep the student away. Nevertheless, following topics might be suggested for further studies:

1. AI-Student Power Dynamics of Politeness.
2. The Paradox of Pragmatic Drift: A longitudinal Analysis.
3. Cross-cultural Pragmatic Failures in ESL/EFL.

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