

ACADEMIC WRITING COMPETENCE: RETHINKING THE PROCESS IN THE GENERATIVE AI ERA

Tatiana YAVUZ

“Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University of Chişinău

Articolul de față este o trecere în revistă a unui aspect ce ține de una dintre cele mai discutate subiecte cu referire la studenții actuali: utilizarea instrumentelor inteligenței artificiale în procesul de scriere academică. Competența de scriere academică este o competență ce se formează pe parcursul anilor de studii prin dezvoltarea capacităților de analiză, sinteză, de gândire critică, ș.a., astfel că studentul ajunge să producă text trecând prin mai multe etape, fapt ce îi permite să accedă spre o lucrare personală, create în condiții etice, cu responsabilitate și drept de autor. Era IA oferă posibilități ce pot scurta din parcursul necesar scrierii unui text academic, cu rezerve însă pentru formarea studentului, etica demersului său științific, etc.

Cuvinte cheie: *inteligenta artificială generativă, gândire critică, scriere academică, competență de scriere academică.*

This article is a review of an aspect related to one of the most discussed topics with reference to current students: the use of artificial intelligence tools in the academic writing process. Academic writing competence is a competence that is formed during the years of study by developing the capacities of analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, etc., so that the student ends up producing text going through several stages, which allows him to access a personal work, created under ethical conditions, with responsibility and copyright. The AI era offers possibilities that can shorten the time required to write an academic text, with reservations, however, for the training of the student, the ethics of his scientific approach, etc.

Keywords: *generative artificial intelligence, critical thinking, academic writing, academic writing competency.*

Artificial intelligence is a phenomenon, the conceptual foundations of which were laid in antiquity; philosophers, great ancient thinkers explored concepts of thinking, reasoning and logic that were the basis for the creation of AI. The simulation of human thinking has been a concept for hundreds of years, and very recently it has also become a reality, a reality that encompasses more and more aspects of life. Diverse, vast fields, large, heterogeneous audiences, young or mature ages, all now have access to the possibilities offered by AI: with the only caveat that not all understand the profound implications of using this phenomenon.

For hundreds of years, universities and those who learn, study and teach there have had a special status through the capacity for critical thinking, logic and reasoning, elements specific to the concept of *akademia*. The era of generative artificial intelligence places science and knowledge in an apparent shadow cone, given the seemingly limitless possibilities offered by this phenomenon. The profound implications of artificial intelligence for higher education, in particular,

offer space for reflection, but also for action, perhaps for the processes of writing, learning, teaching, idea generation, which seem to be in crisis, being competed with by artificial intelligence and its accessibility. “In academic writing, it is necessary to produce logically structured ideas with well-thoughtout, verified points and to consider different opinions” (Gillet, Hammond & Martala, 2009), which has become very simple thanks to the possibilities offered by AI, the clarifications that can be made, access to enormous databases that can structure, argue and present large amounts of information in extremely short periods of time, this factor becoming a reference.

In this article, we aim to analyze some considerations related to students' academic writing skills in a context where access to AI products is easy, and its implications are not yet, in some places, sufficiently illustrated, framed in a legal and ethical context. What is the future of works that have been presented in an academic style for hundreds of years, and can currently be successfully produced by generative artificial intelligence, which can be educated, trained, so as to provide optimal answers, from positions clearly superior to the students' preparation?

We will briefly review the elements of the academic writing process, the characteristics of broad linguistic models (LLMs) with the idea of a debate on solutions and possibilities for adapting to the new realities of AI tools.

The temptation of AI for students is very high. Over the years of study, the ability to write academically: clear, concise, formal, argumentative and structured is a skill to develop methodically, intensively and inherent in the process of obtaining qualifications in a certain field. Year theses, essays, practice reports, project reports, articles, bachelor's theses, all materials that can be obtained through study, analysis, comparison and personal and involved efforts. Generative artificial intelligence has greatly simplified this process, so that a practice report or a chapter of a bachelor's thesis is within the range of well-formulated and correctly structured parameters.

The transformative impact of tools like Chat GPT is immeasurable, given their accessibility and huge and tireless potential for producing texts (and not only) in a short time, of good quality, with references, structure and precision.

According to Flower, “...the act of writing involves three major elements which are reflected in the three ...: the task environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the writing processes...” (Flower, Hayes, 1981). Thanks to AI tools, these 3 stages can be quantitatively compressed: time, space, effort, but at the same time providing a broad, presumably more qualitative and well-structured result.

However, given ethical considerations, AI tools often state when requesting precise, relevant citations, extracted from the body of articles on a particular topic, that there are several reasons why these requests cannot be proposed. First of all, it is about the fluidity of the existence of information in virtual space (pages exist at a given time, a certain structure of them can be modified or disappear), as well as copyright (academic ethics of course presuppose the original consumption of the materials that will be cited), and last but not least, it is about the actual context of the citation that will be used (AI behaves as a simulator of human thinking, but has too little data to truly and fully understand the reasoning and personal intention of a scientific endeavor).

In the traditional academic landscape, academic writing competence is perceived as a set of skills, which primarily refers to personal intellectual effort, as mentioned above, but also to a transparent communication process. It is about the ability to formulate original ideas, to participate in critical thinking processes, to build arguments and logical reasoning, but also of course the part related to paraphrasing, synthesis of analyses through clear, concise, structured language. In the context of an ethical intention, these skills form academic writing competence and underlie the concepts of academic integrity. Due to the fact that AI operates with broad linguistic models (LLM), which are "...LLMs are a critical component in generative AI capability, making them powerful tools for a range of natural language processing tasks such as: searching, translating, and summarizing text, responding to questions and generating new content including text, images, music, and software code..." (10). Today's student is challenged by the possibilities offered, so they often give up the context and ethical comfort, in order to offer structured, practiced, trained texts, which take a moderate effort, with fewer personal implications. Artificial intelligence addresses first and foremost the concept of originality. Existing AI tools offer the option of co-piloting when it comes to editing, making improvements to a text, at the same time, they support the writer, through logical, pertinent proposals that optimize the produced text. However, it is the student/author who chooses to follow the suggestions or avoid them. Another situation is where the writer only generates instructions for the type of information, the style he needs, and then, Mollick and Mollick (2024) ask themselves the question, what is the degree of originality of the final material, considering that although he generated the instruction and guided the thinking process, the author is not the one who produced the text and did not identify all the sources from which the proposed reasoning was made. Academic writing is perceived as the product of critical thinking, so the ability to analyze, reason, identify arguments, draw logical conclusions, evaluate information represent stages of a valuable process, inherent in the cognitive process of the person who writes. The development of AI tools that select, reason, structure and make conclusions and recommendations raises the question of the legitimacy of the author who evades the entire writing process by resorting to tools that facilitate these processes. According to Flower și Hayes "cognitive process theory highlights, writing involves recursive acts of planning, translating, and reviewing – demanding significant cognitive effort." (Flower, Hayes 1981). In this situation, the student who supplements his effort with the help of tools loses understanding of the information he has processed, becomes superficial in his capacity for analysis and critical thinking, so he can no longer be considered the author of a work, but, more seriously, we consider that he has not learned to think independently, without being supported by tools, designed to help, and not to produce. Another relevant moment in the help offered by AI refers to copyright: traditional academic writing implies that what is presented constitutes the intellectual property of the author, and he has moral and legal responsibility, both for the words and for the ideas written. As Bertram Gallant (Gallant, 2008) emphasizes, "integrity rests on a foundation of trust and individual accountability", so the integrity of intellectual property becomes questionable: does it remain the property of the person who claims it as his own, or can it be shared with a non-human entity? All these moments will surely redefine research, academic writing, academic writing competence in the

future, currently trying to legitimize or blame this type of plagiarism, so convenient and useful in the process of academic writing and not only. Concerns surrounding the integration of generative AI in academic contexts encompass academic misconduct, over-reliance on technology, authenticity issues, and the promotion of passive learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Bygstad et al., 2022).

However, it would be a mistake to consider the integration of artificial intelligence in education, in educational products, a negative process. AI tools offer us a lot of possibilities and opportunities, it's all about finding the right balance and approach and showing it to our students. Although at the moment most teachers see an enemy behind these models, the danger does not necessarily lie in the use of these tools, but in their use for the purpose of obtaining undeserved benefits. Guiding this process of supporting studies, directing teaching tasks, selecting information can lead to a more dynamic learning, writing, development process, taking advantage of the speed and multitude of ideas and examples offered by AI in the process of writing information. One of the basic opportunities is to use the tools as an assistant, co-pilot – at maximum potential – sophisticated assistance in the writing process.

AI tools can help students overcome writing barriers: identifying the necessary words, the right style and tone, correctly structuring information, overcoming blockages, etc. According to Mali (Mali, 2022), „technology can serve as a valuable tool to assist students in overcoming challenges during English academic writing”. Grammar and style checkers such as Grammarly have evolved a lot in recent times, so they can detect mistakes or inaccuracies in style and grammar, syntax or vocabulary, thus providing a more concise, clear text, adapted to the needs of writing. Thus, students have the opportunity to focus on critical thinking, evaluating results, selecting information, etc. Such a primary editor is a sure help in situations where a large volume of text (year thesis, bachelor's thesis, article) needs to be structured, adapted. Next, we can mention the personalized feedback option that AI tools offer: the traditional feedback from the teacher is often delayed, lacking in details. AI tools can provide detailed initial feedback, with suggestions related to both grammar and style, as well as ideas, arguments, and the correctness of citations. Students themselves can verify the logic behind the suggestions, thus optimizing their topic or product. And last but not least, the ability of AI tools to process large texts is a resource that, if properly put at the disposal of students, can help them in the process of summarizing large amounts of information, searching for keywords, identifying concepts. Thus, students at an initial stage of study or knowledge of database navigation processes can also gain access to valuable resources that can help them in the writing process. Likewise, the adapted, gradual, considered integration of AI tools in academic writing can only have benefits, if the parameters imposed by ethics, copyright and responsibilities are respected. Or, by automating some processes (grammatical, stylistic correctness, identification of vocabulary gaps, etc.) the student can obtain a better and deeper understanding of the material, more time, focus and multitasking in order to increase writing efficiency and performance.

In conclusion, we can say that the correct and ethical use of AI resources is an opportunity for students who are in the process of writing, as long as AI literacy also involves learning the dangers it entails. For academic writing competence to remain a robust and relevant competence, both students and teachers must strive

towards AI literacy – a new era competence that offers the possibility of writing and producing texts staying in the paradigm of ethicism and fairness.

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