mapub.org/mapeh

MAP Education and Humanities

Volume 6

MAP Education and Humanities (MAPEH) is a scholarly peer-reviewed international scientific journal published by **MAP** - *Multidisciplinary Academic Publishing*, focusing on empirical and theoretical research in all fields of education and humanities.

E-ISSN: **2744-2373**

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

PEDAGOGICAL VOICE OR ALGORITHMIC AUTHORITY? A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CHATGPT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Ajla Aljović

International Burch University, *Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ajla Aljović, International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. E-mail: ajla.aljovic@ibu.edu.ba.

ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence-powered tutors such as ChatGPT, Duolingo, and Grammarly are increasingly integrated into language education, reshaping how authority, correctness, and learning are communicated. While these tools promise efficiency and personalized feedback, their discourse carries implicit ideologies that influence learner identity and perceptions of English. This study critically examines how AI tutors construct pedagogical authority and embed language ideologies through their responses to learner queries. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a corpus of 40 AI-generated responses was analyzed across five functional categories. Findings reveal three dominant patterns: (1) pedagogical authority without dialogue, achieved through modals, imperatives, and praise strategies; (2) linguistic homogenization, privileging Standard English and formal norms while ignoring multilingual variation; and (3) neoliberal framing of learning as an efficiency-driven, individualized process. These results highlight the non-neutral nature of AI discourse and its alignment with broader technocratic and neoliberal logics in education. The article concludes with implications for critical digital pedagogy, advocating for reflexive design, multilingual sensitivity, and teacher mediation in AI-supported language learning.

Keywords: AI in education, language learning, ChatGPT, pedagogical authority, digital literacy

MAP EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

Volume 6

ISSN: 2744-2373/ © The Authors. Published by **MAP** - *Multidisciplinary Academic Publishing*.

Article Submitted: **04 September 2025**
Article Accepted: **09 December 2025**
Article Published: **10 December 2025**

https://doi.org/10.53880/2744-2373.2025.6.109

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE
Aljović A.(2025). **Pedagogical Voice or Algorithmic Authority? A Critical Discourse Analysis of ChatGPT in Language Learning**. MAP Education and Humanities, 6, 109-122.
doi: https://doi.org/10.53880/2744-2373.2025.6.109

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized education in recent years, changing both how teachers and students learn. AI is being incorporated into educational procedures more and more, from personalized learning recommendations to automated grading systems. Among these apps, ChatGPT, Duolingo, Grammarly, and ELSA Speak, all AI-powered language learning programs, have become quite popular. These resources advertise themselves as cutting-edge substitutes for or enhancements to conventional teaching, promising accessibility, effectiveness, and immediate feedback. For English as a second or foreign language learners, particularly those in underdeveloped or cross-border situations, these tools provide previously unheard-of chances to interact with the language outside of the classroom.

While there are clear benefits, the use of AI tutors in language education raises serious pedagogical, linguistic, and ideological issues. The bulk of research, for example, Beatty (2010) and Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), has focused on the technological features, accuracy, and adaptability of these systems as a whole. Less criticism has been made on the actual language produced by these systems and the set of assumptions it presupposes. The AI-driven instructional tools for language education interact with students for more than the purpose of fixing mistakes and providing synonyms. Interactions with these platforms implicitly create relationships and hierarchies of power. They help shape the accepted set of rules and project guiding principles relating to the ideology of speaking, writing, and "knowing" English. These nuances, for the most part, go undetected, yet they make up the hidden curriculum Paulo Freire (1970) discussed – the set of immeasurable and unofficial lessons communicated through the physical and linguistic aspects of an educational institution.

Especially in the context of learning the English language, the subtext curriculum assumes greater importance. English is a global lingua franca; however, attempts to learn may reflect ideological tussle shaped by the English language's colonial, economic, and cultural histories. The colonial English language and its standardized platforms, alongside its teaching and representation, trigger a certain degree of linguistic hegemony, neoliberalism, and native-speakerism. In this respect, AI tutors' language is inequitable; moderation based on meagre rules, extensive training datasets, and sweeping language biases result in preferential creativity, variation, and fluency 'over' standard form, communicative competence, and correctness. Such vocabulary is charged with ideology; therefore, such language choices demonstrate a culturally imbibed expectation of English and an unfair imagination of the learner as moldable to, and under the obligation 'to', conform to, acceptance of the language.

In this article, AI tutors are examined as discursive actors, entities that not only dispense information but also participate in the construction of meaning through language. Adopting the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study investigates the ways AI tutors, such as ChatGPT, build educational authority, construct learner identity, and represent English language norms in their responses to learner questions. The paper argues that AI-generated discourse in the context of language learning mirrors and perpetuates certain ideologies related to English, learning, and teaching. These ideologies are consistent with the larger neoliberal and technocratic logic in education, insofar as they are driven by managerial logics to do with efficiency, standardization, and individualized improvement. In addition, they undermine dialogic pedagogy, multiculturalism, and learner agency.

To explore these dynamics, the study examines a corpus of AI-generated responses to simulated learner prompts. These prompts reflect common queries in English learning, ranging from grammar correction and vocabulary use to writing feedback and politeness strategies. The analysis is guided by three interrelated questions:

- How do AI tutors linguistically construct their pedagogical authority in their interactions with learners?
- What ideologies about English language, correctness, and competence are embedded in their responses?
- How might these discursive patterns affect learners' perceptions of English, learning, and their own linguistic identity?

These questions are situated within broader theoretical concerns about language, power, and education. Drawing on the work of Fairclough (1995), the article employs CDA to uncover the linguistic features and discursive practices through which AI

tutors perform their pedagogical roles. It also draws on critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) and poststructuralist perspectives on English Language Teaching (ELT), which emphasize the need to interrogate the assumptions that underlie "neutral" educational discourse.

The emphasis on AI-generated language in this research is timely and important. Researchers and educators need to comprehend how AI generative language models construct knowledge and authority as these tools become increasingly embedded in education systems globally, not only to improve AI technologies but also to safeguard the critical and inclusive possibilities of education. Much of the public discussion presents AI tutors as neutral or unbiased; however, this article questions that assumption and the agency in outputs that encapsulates the human values and ideological choices.

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the growing field of critical digital pedagogy by offering a linguistic lens through which to examine the educational role of AI. It argues for the importance of reflective, human-centered approaches to technology integration, approaches that recognize the power of language not just to teach, but to shape how learners understand themselves, their languages, and their place in the world.

Literature Review

The use of artificial intelligence within education has garnered substantial scholarly and organizational attention in recent years. Often framed as a technological revolution, AI is viewed as a way to achieve gains in efficiency, personalizing instruction and expanding access to quality educational opportunities (Luckin et al.,2016; Holmes et al., 2019). In language education contexts, AI-enabled applications, such as ChatGPT, Duolingo, Grammarly and ELSA Speak, promise instant feedback, interactive, and adaptive feedback. Many of these applications use natural language processing (NLP), large language models (LLMs) and machine-learning algorithms to analyze, interpret and react to learners' input and provide appropriate feedback or corrections.

Despite their increasing use, most studies to date have focused on the functionality and pedagogical efficacy of such systems (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Tsai, 2021). Research tends to highlight accuracy rates, learner motivation, and comparative learning gains rather than the discursive properties of AI feedback or the ideological implications of their language choices. The implicit assumption is that AI-generated responses are neutral, technical, and primarily shaped by their training data and algorithmic efficiency. However, this assumption overlooks the fact that AI, while non-human, functions as a communicator and pedagogue. As Weller (2020) argues, educational technologies are never value-free; they are designed, trained, and deployed within sociocultural contexts that inevitably shape their discourse.

CDA provides us with a potent analytical lens through which to analyze the language of AI tutors, not merely as a means of transmitting information, but rather as an ideological practice. CDA is derived from the foundational work of Fairclough (1992, 1995), van Dijk (1993), and Wodak (1996), and views language as a site where power relations are both reflected and reproduced in society. It has been utilized in educational contexts to interrogate the language of various educational texts, including textbooks (Gray, 2010), standardized tests (Shohamy, 2001), policy documents (Ball, 1993), and teacher talk (Walsh, 2006).

All these studies identify that discourse is never neutral; language is if encoded with beliefs about knowledge, authority, identity, and belonging. In the case of AI tutors, CDA allows us to articulate the machine-generated feedback as a form of pedagogical discourse that influences students but also conveys implicit conventions for what constitutes "correct," "appropriate, or "standard" English. Thus, there is a shift away from performance as a focus and moves towards ideology, namely, the ways that AI systems continue to reinforce certain ideologies about language and learning in the world, as they claim to be free from ideologies.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA is especially relevant here. It includes:

- Textual analysis – examining word choice, modality, transitivity, and structure.
- Discursive practice – analyzing how texts are produced, consumed, and interpreted.
- Social practice – situating discourse within broader ideological and institutional frameworks.

By applying this model to AI tutor responses, the present study explores how linguistic choices shape perceptions of educational authority and language legitimacy.

In traditional classroom contexts, pedagogical authority arises from a relational amalgamation of expertise, trust, relational engagement, and positional consequence. Teachers will enact both content and discourse actions to assert their roles and responsibilities within the classroom (Mercer, 2000). This constructed relationship suddenly comes undone when the learning environment is digital and mediated by artificial intelligence (AI). Instead of the human figure, authority is now based on the voice of the system; an algorithm trained to simulate helpfulness, confidence, and neutrality.

The discourse of AI tutors represents a new type of pedagogical voice - one that is directive, yet abstract, and has obvious features of an instructional genre: modal verbs ("You should..."); hedging language ("It might be better to..."); and affirmations ("Great work!"). By using these linguistic features, the AI tutors create a kind of simulated affective relationship. However, there are genuine issues concerning the lack of actual empathy, the absence of dialogue and contextual awareness that are both powerful and highly problematic. Gert Biesta (2006) warns against an education strategy of "learnification," and what he means is that "learnification" positions learning as a depersonalized exchange only concerned with learning skills or content, and not relational and transformative. In AI tutoring, the dangers of "learnification" are particularly present because AI educational designs push students through a series of scripts geared to position as symmetrized what is most often envisioned as a collaborative relationship among human learners and educators. The design of AI tutoring views learning as an effect of delivery with a clear priority given to process and correctness with little space for dialogue and criticality often central to learning environments.

While English is a global language of communication and interaction, it is also a site of ideological conflict and political economy. Scholars such as Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (2001), and Canagarajah (2013) have attended to the ways in which English language teaching (ELT) can perpetuate hierarchies of race, class, and nation. The global dominance of English, especially "Standard" British or American varieties, is often framed as pragmatic, but in practice it privileges certain accents, grammars, and cultural scripts while marginalizing others.

When considering this in the context of AI, this challenge becomes especially pronounced. Most AI models are trained on a corpus of texts with frequently standard forms of English which are dominated by, often, Anglo-American norms (Bender et al., 2021). As such, the outputs of these models (i.e. the ways in which they respond), are more disposed to reinforce hegemonic language ideologies which are dismissive of non-native or localized varieties of English and cast non-standardized forms as incorrect or non-preferable. This raises massive implications for learners with multi-lingual identities, who may not see the kinds of Englishes affixed to their identity validated, in the AI-generated feedback they receive.

Moreover, AI tutors often ignore or under-problematize sociocultural variety which is central to real-world language proficiency. For instance, the ways that requests are made, and disagreements are expressed are shaped by culturally and socially negotiated pragmatic norms, but AI tutors often generalize or flatten these particularities into a single "politeness" or "professionalism" standard. This aligns with a technocratic understanding of language-as-transferrable and measurable skill sets that fits into global labor markets, but which fails to capture the deep-seated complexity of human communication.

The examination of AI tutors is inseparable from broader critiques of neoliberal education. Within educational systems, neoliberalism focuses on standardization, accountability, self-management, and market-oriented reform (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2004). The teacher becomes the facilitator, the learner becomes a consumer, and education becomes a product to be optimized. Digital tools (including AI tutors) are a natural fit, as they can provide scalable, data-driven, and potentially cheap solutions.

This perspective neglects the affective, ethical, and political dimensions in teaching and learning. AI tutors will tend to promote correctness, fluency, and politeness (the latter defined by decontextualized, standardized norms), and in doing so, these tutors endorse the notion that there is a narrow kind of language competence. This is an example of what Alastair Pennycook (2001) has referred to as the "myth of English as a neutral tool."

In fact, AI pedagogical choices, no matter how detached they appear, are influenced by systems of power in their training data and programming goals.

By adopting a critical digital pedagogy lens (Selwyn, 2014; Williamson, 2017), this study approaches AI-generated feedback as more than technological output. It sees it as a discursive and ideological act—one that informs learners' views not only of English but also of what counts as learning, success, and improvement. In doing so, it aligns with Freirean conceptions of education as a political practice and seeks to interrogate the invisible assumptions encoded in machine-mediated teaching.

Taken together, these literatures highlight a significant research gap. While AI in education has been widely studied in terms of performance and access, its discursive dimensions, particularly in language learning, remain underexplored. CDA, combined with insights from language ideology and neoliberal education theory, offers a powerful way to uncover how AI tutors shape pedagogical authority, learner identity, and normative representations of English. The present study contributes to this emerging field by treating AI-generated language not merely as data but as discourse, discourse that reflects, sustains, and at times challenges dominant ideologies in education.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in CDA to examine the pedagogical discourse of AI-powered English language tutors. The central aim is to explore how AI-generated responses to learner queries construct authority, encode language ideologies, and reflect broader educational values. The methodology involves the construction and analysis of a purpose-built corpus of AI-generated responses, analyzed through Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework.

The research design is qualitative, corpus-informed, and interpretive. Rather than testing a hypothesis or evaluating system accuracy, the focus is on uncovering patterns in language use and ideological positioning within AI tutor discourse. The central assumption is that language produced by AI systems, though machine-generated, functions discursively and socially, shaping learners' understanding of correctness, appropriateness, and educational authority.

The analysis centers on a corpus of 40 AI-generated responses to a range of simulated learner prompts. These prompts reflect typical queries submitted by intermediate-level learners of English (CEFR A2–B2), covering grammar, vocabulary, politeness strategies, writing feedback, and spoken fluency. All prompts were developed by the researcher, based on observed learner needs in preparatory and undergraduate English programs at a cross-border university context.

The corpus comprises 40 AI-generated responses, collected using the ChatGPT interface (version GPT-4, as of June 2025). Each response was elicited through a neutral browser session to prevent context accumulation across turns. This allowed each interaction to remain self-contained and free from previous conversational influence. The 40 prompts were evenly distributed across five functional categories:

Table 1.
Prompts' categories

Category	Example Prompt
Grammar correction	"Is this sentence correct: *He don't like coffee*?"
Vocabulary support	"What is a more formal word for *really good* in academic writing?"
Writing feedback	"Can you improve this email: 'I want meeting you tomorrow'?"
Politeness/ pragmatics	"How do I ask for help politely in English?"
Spoken fluency	"What can I say to start small talk in an online class?"

Table 1 provides a short overview of the corpus used for analysis, which includes 40 AI-generated responses distributed across five functional categories. This categorization allowed for systematic sampling of responses reflecting different pedagogical purposes, ensuring a balanced representation for CDA.

Each AI response ranged from 50 to 150 words, yielding a corpus of approximately 4,300 words.

All responses were saved in a spreadsheet format, including:

- prompt text
- full AI response

- category tag
- notes on tone, modality, and discursive features (coded during analysis)

The data were analyzed using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA model, which allows for both micro-linguistic analysis and broader socio-ideological interpretation. The framework comprises:

1. Textual analysis – Investigating language features such as:

- Modality (e.g., "should," "can," "you must");
- Voice (passive/active constructions);
- Sentence structure and tone (e.g., imperative, hedging);
- Repetition, formulaic expressions, and lexical choices.

2. Discursive practice – Examining how the AI constructs interactional roles:

- How is authority claimed or mitigated?
- Are learners positioned as passive receivers or active participants?
- What conversational norms are being reproduced?

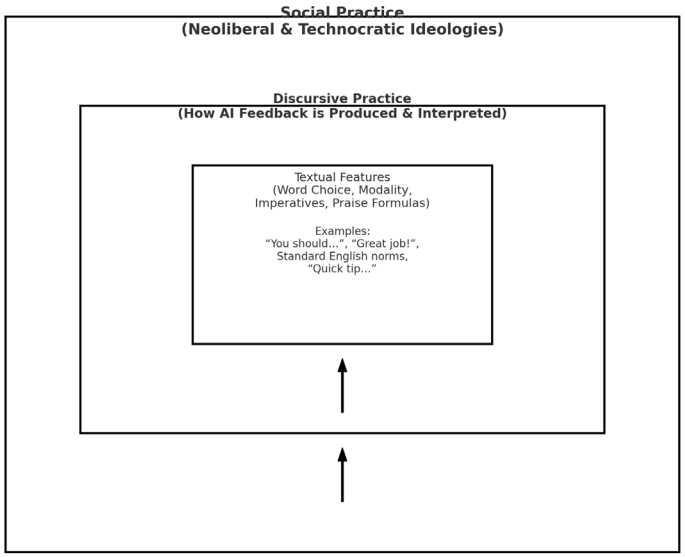
3. Social practice – Interpreting the broader ideological implications:

- Do responses promote linguistic standardization?
- How do they reflect neoliberal values (efficiency,correctness,self-management)?
- What language ideologies are privileged or silenced?

This framework enables a layered analysis, connecting surface-level linguistic features with the underlying values and assumptions embedded in AI educational discourse.

Figure 1 illustrates how Fairclough's model was adapted for AI tutor discourse, and it illustrates the interconnected layers of analysis: textual features (e.g., modality, praise formulas, Standard English norms), discursive practices (how AI feedback is produced and interpreted), and social practices (broader neoliberal and technocratic ideologies in education).

Figure 1.
Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model adapted for AI tutor discourse.



Note. From Discourse and Social Change (p. 73), by N. Fairclough, 1992, Polity Press. Copyright 1992 by Polity Press.

A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used. An initial coding scheme was created based on key categories from the literature (e.g., modality, prescriptivism, voice, formality). Additional codes emerged during the close reading of the responses, including:

- Praise formulae (e.g., "Great job!" / "That's correct!");
- Cultural flattening (e.g., ignoring register or variation);
- Efficiency emphasis (e.g., "The easiest way is..." / "A quick tip...").

All data were coded manually and reviewed twice for consistency.

As a researcher with formal training in English language and literature, and professional experience in preparatory and cross-border educational programs, I approach AI discourse from both pedagogical and critical linguistic perspectives. I recognize that my interpretations

are shaped by this dual lens, and I embrace the CDA stance that research is inherently situated and reflexive. This study does not aim to offer a "neutral" evaluation of AI platforms, but to critically interrogate their language use in the context of power, ideology, and education.

This study adheres to ethical standards for discourse research involving non-human data sources:

- No human subjects were involved.
- All AI-generated texts were produced through public interfaces and anonymized prompts.
- No personally identifiable data were collected.
- The corpus will not be used for commercial or exploitative purposes.

AI-generated content is treated as a form of public discourse and analyzed as linguistic artefact rather than confidential data.

The following section discusses how Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model manifested in the corpus through four dominant themes.

Analysis and Findings

Constructing Pedagogical Authority

A key aim of this study was to investigate how AI tutors construct pedagogical authority—how they "sound like teachers." Across the corpus, AI responses consistently employ modal verbs, imperative structures, and praise strategies to guide learner behavior and frame correct answers.

a) Modality and Directive Language

Most responses contain modal auxiliaries such as should, can, need to, and it's best to. These construct soft authority through suggestions rather than commands. For example:

"You should use 'doesn't' here instead of 'don't' because 'he' is third person singular."

The use of should marks obligation but retains politeness. More direct imperatives also occur, especially in writing tasks:

"Replace 'want meeting' with 'want to meet.'"

"Try rewriting the sentence for clarity."

This instructional style reflects a didactic, monologic model of teaching (Biesta, 2006), where the tutor corrects rather than negotiates. It suggests authority is constructed not through dialogue but through linguistic scaffolding of correctness.

b) Praise and Encouragement Formulas

AI tutors frequently use phrases such as *"Great job!", "You're on the right track!",* or *"That's almost perfect!"* This performative feedback serves both affective and pedagogical functions. While seemingly supportive, it also reinforces the instructor–learner hierarchy by positioning the AI as evaluator.

c) Hedging and Politeness

Interestingly, ChatGPT often employs hedging *("You might consider…", "One way to say this is…"),* softening its authority. This can create the illusion of negotiation, but the lack of interactive follow-up renders it rhetorical. There is no real dialogic co-construction of meaning.

AI tutors adopt a hybrid voice – polite, semi-authoritative, and affectively affirming – yet ultimately monologic. This affirms their role as algorithmic instructors rather than conversational partners, subtly embedding a technocratic pedagogy based on optimization, not exploration.

"You should always use the past tense here."

"Make sure you follow this rule."

"That's incorrect; the correct form is…"

These examples reinforce the authoritative, prescriptive stance with no negotiation or dialogic space.

Language Ideologies in AI Feedback

The second key finding relates to the ideologies about English embedded in AI-generated feedback. The corpus reveals a strong preference for standardized, formal, and grammatically prescriptive norms, suggesting an implicit endorsement of native-speaker, standard-English ideology.

a) Prescriptivism and Standard English

AI responses repeatedly prioritize correction of grammar, word order, and collocation based on standard norms:

> *"Instead of saying 'very big car,' you could say 'enormous car'—which is more formal."*
>
> *"Avoid using 'gonna' in writing; use 'going to' instead."*

The corrections align almost entirely with British or American Standard English, with little acknowledgement of World Englishes or regional variation. For instance, non-native syntactic patterns or lexico-semantic innovations are marked as incorrect, even when pragmatically acceptable.

b) Formality and Politeness as Norms

AI tutors promote hyper-formality, especially in writing tasks:

> *"To sound more professional, avoid contractions and use formal connectors like 'however' or 'moreover.'"*

In responses about pragmatics, politeness is framed as universal and formulaic rather than culturally specific. For example:

> *"Always say 'Could you please…' to sound polite in English."*

Such statements suggest a flattened view of pragmatics, ignoring sociolinguistic variation and cultural norms in politeness strategies (e.g., in Korean, Turkish, or Brazilian Portuguese contexts).

c) Absence of Cultural or Contextual Flexibility

Notably, AI feedback rarely offers alternatives for contextual variation. For instance, slang, informal greetings, or local accents are often ignored or discouraged. This reflects a deficit model toward non-standard Englishes.

AI tutors act as gatekeepers of a narrow linguistic ideology—upholding standard English, discouraging multilingualism, and privileging formality. Their discourse subtly promotes linguistic homogeneity, aligning with institutional pressures in global ELT and marginalizing alternative English identities.

> *"The standard form is 'color'".*
>
> *"It's better to avoid contractions in formal writing."*
>
> *"Use 'whom' instead of 'who' in this sentence."*

These illustrate the prioritization of Standard British English and formality.

Depersonalization and Uniformity in Feedback

While AI tutors offer personalized responses in appearance, a closer analysis reveals a strong pattern of discursive uniformity and depersonalization. The same lexical structures, sentence templates, and correction patterns appear repeatedly across distinct learner prompts.

a) Repetition and Template-Based Output

Many responses include phrases such as:

- *"This sentence is incorrect because…"*
- *"You could say it this way instead…"*
- *"Here's a better way to phrase it…"*

Although such phrasing maintains clarity and consistency, it also contributes to the mechanical tone of the AI's pedagogical persona. Instead of dynamically adapting to learner style, context, or emotional tone, the feedback is algorithmically templated, which flattens variation and nuance.

b) Lack of Dialogic Interaction

Unlike a human tutor who might ask a clarifying question or adapt feedback based on the student's intent or background, AI tutors do not invite clarification or negotiation. The AI's role is evaluative and corrective, not interactive. For instance:

> Learner Prompt: *"I want meeting you."*
>
> AI Response: *"This is incorrect. Use: 'I want to meet you.'"*

There is no invitation for follow-up, no exploration of alternative phrasings based on purpose or register. This presents a banking model of instruction (Freire, 1970), where the

learner passively receives corrections without co-constructing knowledge.

c) Absence of Personalization or Affect

Even when AI tutors use praise (e.g., "Nice try!"), they rarely reference the learner's individual context, prior errors, or learning goals. The tone is friendly but generic, lacking personalization. In this sense, the AI tutor simulates empathy but cannot generate affective presence, which is vital in human-centered language teaching (Mercer, 2000).

Despite mimicking interactivity, AI tutors operate through a one-size-fits-all instructional script. Their discourse prioritizes structure, uniformity, and reproducibility—hallmarks of automated pedagogy, but far removed from the adaptive, relational nature of human teaching.

Neoliberal and Technocratic Framing of Learning

The final theme reveals that AI tutors often frame language learning through a neoliberal lens, emphasizing efficiency, correctness, self-optimization, and clarity—rather than critical thinking, creativity, or cultural negotiation.

a) Emphasis on Clarity, Simplicity, and Efficiency

Phrases such as *"The easiest way to say this…"* or *"To make your writing clearer…"* occur frequently in writing-related responses. These expressions reinforce an instrumental view of language, that is language as a tool to be optimized.

Such discourse implicitly promotes a utilitarian model of learning, aligning with neoliberal educational values: self-improvement, measurable outcomes, and productivity (Ball, 2003; Selwyn, 2014). For example:

> *"To improve your writing, remove unnecessary words and use more precise vocabulary."*

The focus is not on argumentation or voice, but on compression and lexical accuracy.

b) Erasure of Cultural and Political Dimensions

Language is inherently cultural and political. Yet AI tutors rarely acknowledge this. In prompts relating to politeness or idioms, responses often present a universalized English:

> *"The polite way to ask is: 'Could you please…'"*

> *"To sound natural, say: 'Nice to meet you.'"*

There is no mention of variation across Englishes, or of cultural communicative norms (e.g., how indirectness is valued in some cultures). The AI's feedback thereby neutralizes context, which risks reproducing hegemonic norms as "objective" or "correct."

c) Learner as Autonomous Consumer

By design, AI tutors target individual users, not classrooms or communities. The learner is framed as an independent agent, responsible for identifying and correcting their deficiencies. This mirrors the logic of learnification (Biesta, 2006), where learning becomes a product and the learner a self-managing client.

There are no references to collaboration, discussion, or collective meaning-making. Even metalinguistic comments (e.g., "Here's why this is incorrect…") are diagnostic rather than exploratory. This reflects a technocratic logic of education—learn fast, alone, and with minimal friction.

The AI tutor's discourse encodes a neoliberal pedagogy, where success is equated with clarity, correctness, and self-management. Absent are critical, pluralistic, or emancipatory views of language learning.

> *"Here's a quick tip to improve faster."*

> *"Optimize your writing with these simple steps."*

> *"Boost your English skills in just 5 minutes a day."*

These reflect the productivity-oriented, efficiency-driven language that aligns with neoliberal discourse.

The following table summarizes all the findings mentioned above.

Table 2 summarizes the three dominant discursive patterns identified in the analysis: pedagogical authority without dialogue, linguistic homogenization, and neoliberal framing of learning.

Each theme is illustrated with representative textual features and corresponding interpretative claims, demonstrating how micro-level choices connect to macro-level ideologies

Table 2.
Summary of Findings

Discourse Theme	Key Features Identified
Pedagogical Authority	Modal verbs, directives, praise formulas, softened authority but strong correctional tone
Linguistic Ideologies	Standard English preference, formality bias, lack of acknowledgment of World Englishes
Depersonalization	Template repetition, lack of interaction, generic tone, absence of affective response
Neoliberal Framing	Emphasis on clarity, efficiency, self-correction, individual responsibility, technocracy

CDA Coding Framework

Table 3.
CDA Coding Framework

Code	Definition	Example from Corpus
MOD – Modality	Use of modal verbs to guide or suggest	"You should…" / "You can…" / "It's best to…"
IMP – Imperatives	Direct commands or instruction	"Try replacing…" / "Use this instead."
HED – Hedging	Use of language to soften or mitigate authority	"You might consider…" / "One way to say this is…"
PRS – Praise Formula	Use of evaluative, encouraging language	"Great job!" / "Nice try!"
STD – Standard Norms	Emphasis on British/American Standard English	"Use 'doesn't' for third person singular."
FOR – Formality Bias	Preference for formal/academic register	"Avoid contractions." / "Say 'therefore' instead of 'so.'"
UNI – Universalism	Claims that a phrase/strategy is "always correct" or polite	"Always say 'please'…"
MUL – Multilingualism	Acknowledgment of linguistic or cultural variation	**Rare** (flag absence more often than presence)
EFD – Efficiency Discourse	Language promoting speed, optimization, or simplicity	"The easiest way is…" / "Quick tip…"

Table 3 outlines the coding framework adapted from Fairclough's three-dimensional model, including linguistic, discursive, and ideological markers. This framework guided the identification of modality, prescriptive language, praise strategies, and references to efficiency, which were crucial for mapping how authority and ideology are embedded in AI discourse.

Discussion

The analysis of AI tutor responses reveals a discourse that is structured, supportive, and ostensibly helpful, but also deeply shaped by ideological assumptions about language, learning, and authority. By interpreting these patterns through a critical discourse lens, we gain insight into how pedagogical AI not only teaches language but also teaches what language is, how learning should occur, and who the learner is supposed to become. This section reflects on these findings considering broader debates in applied linguistics, digital pedagogy, and the political economy of education.

The Algorithm as a Teacher: Authority Without Dialogue

One of the most salient findings is the way AI tutors construct pedagogical authority. Their responses project confidence, expertise, and correctness through modals, imperatives, and prescriptive feedback—yet they do so without dialogue. This challenges traditional understandings of teacher authority as something negotiated in interaction, through rapport, empathy, and responsiveness (Mercer, 2000; Biesta, 2006). AI tutors simulate this interpersonal dynamic through praise formulas and hedging, but their discourse remains monologic, transactional, and scripted.

This form of algorithmic authority aligns with what Williamson (2017) describes as automated expertise: trust in the machine not because of its humanity or relational credibility, but because of its data-driven rationality and consistent output. However, such trust is not neutral. As Fairclough (1995) notes, institutional discourse that appears impartial often serves to obscure power asymmetries. In this case, the AI's seemingly objective feedback masks its lack of contextual understanding and erases the possibility for negotiation or resistance—a key component of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970).

Standard English as Ideology, Not Neutrality

The second main theme, AI's privilege of Standard English and formal correctness, signals a reproduction of linguistic hegemony as a type of helpfulness. Following Canagarajah (2013) and Pennycook (2001) the ideology of Standard English as only form of English privileges certain voices, accents and ways of expression over others. AI tutors in the corpus treat non-standard expressions as errors, do not acknowledge pragmatic variation across cultures, and privilege Anglo-American norms as superior and universally applicable.

This exposes an important tension: although AI systems tout their accessibility for a global audience, they universalize a narrow set of language norms that reinforce a global hierarchy of English. The feedback provided by the system performs what Phillipson (1992) calls linguistic imperialism – not through forced explicitness, but through the default linguistic assumptions in the training data and in the goals of the design.

By privileging the standard in formal ways to avoid informal, hybrid or even creative language use, AI tutors miss the opportunity to celebrate the diversity of World Englishes and translanguaging, familiar to real-world users of English as a Lingua Franca. Their discourse thus reflects an ideology of conformity, not communicative competence.

Learning Without Learners: Depersonalized Pedagogy

AI tutors promise personalization—but what they offer is automated customization, not relational adaptation. The repetition of phrases, fixed feedback patterns, and absence of context-specific advice illustrate a pedagogy of functional uniformity. Learners are positioned as interchangeable users receiving static, rule-based guidance.

This depersonalization stands in contrast to contemporary language teaching theories that emphasize learner identity, agency, and affect (Norton, 2000; Ushioda, 2011). Without affective engagement, AI tutors cannot support motivation, identity work, or critical thinking—only correction and surface fluency.

From a discourse perspective, this lack of dialogic adaptability reflects what Fairclough (1992) calls synthetic personalization: language that mimics personal concern but remains impersonal in function. AI-generated encouragement ("Great job!") thus becomes a linguistic performance—emotionally empty but strategically designed to appear caring. This invites ethical questions about authenticity, trust, and the boundaries of technological empathy in education.

Neoliberal Logics in AI Tutor Discourse

Perhaps most critically, the language of the AI tutor reflects an overarching neoliberal ideology of learning as individual self-improvement oriented towards efficiency, correctness, and clarity. The tutor offers "quick tips," suggests simplified structures, and puts a priority on self-regulation rather than collaboration. Importantly, collective learning, classroom discourse and critical literacy are entirely absent, and are supplanted instead by a focus on optimizing.

This is consistent with Ball's (2003) and Selwyn's (2014) critiques of neoliberal education where the learner is remade as a self-managing client, who is required to develop valuable skills through manageable steps. The AI tutor fits neatly into this model of education, dispensing small, performance-based, information nuggets that resolve to meet global assessment systems and productivity definitions.

This instrumental framing constrains what language education can do. Instead of being a space for creativity, intercultural discovery, or critical inquiry, English assumes a role as a means for employability and correctness. The AI tutor, become an agent of discipline that can subtly influence how learners should speak, write, and think—not via force but via constant reiteration without critique.

Reframing AI Tutors Through a Critical Pedagogical Lens

The findings suggest that AI tutors, though often framed as neutral tools, act as ideological actors in language education. Their discourse embeds assumptions about what counts as good English, good learning, and good teaching. While they may improve access to feedback and reinforce grammatical rules, they also reproduce dominant ideologies under the banner of neutrality and efficiency.

A critical pedagogical perspective urges us to ask: What is lost when the teacher is replaced by a machine? Beyond accuracy, what kinds of relationships, identities, and values are being shaped through these interactions?

To address these concerns, language educators and technologists must move beyond surface evaluations of AI efficiency and engage with their discursive politics. This means:

- Questioning which Englishes are being taught.
- Designing AI systems that can recognize and validate linguistic diversity.
- Embedding opportunities for critical thinking and learner agency.
- Making explicit the assumptions behind AI training data and pedagogical choices.

Such moves will not "fix" AI tutors, but they may make their integration into language learning more transparent, reflexive, and human centered.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the discourse of AI-powered English language tutors using a corpus of 40 responses generated by a large language model in response to typical learner prompts. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, the article explored how these AI tutors construct pedagogical authority, promote particular language ideologies, and embody broader neoliberal logics in their feedback practices.

The findings reveal that, while AI tutors appear supportive and helpful, their language reflects deeper ideological patterns. They consistently construct a pedagogical voice that is authoritative yet impersonal, directive yet non-dialogic. Their discourse privileges Standard English promotes a formal and prescriptive view of correctness, and frames learning as an individual, efficiency-driven process. Moreover, these systems show little capacity for context sensitivity, cultural awareness, or genuine personalization—despite claims of adaptability and learner-centeredness.

In this sense, the AI tutor does not merely respond to learners; it performs an institutional role. It reinforces normative assumptions about what it means to learn English "well" and who gets to decide what counts as correctness, politeness, or professionalism. These assumptions are not neutral. Rather, they echo long-standing hierarchies in English language teaching that privilege native-speaker norms, decontextualized fluency, and instrumental goals.

Crucially, this study positions AI-generated feedback as more than functional language: it is pedagogical discourse—a carrier of ideology and values. From the use of modals and imperatives to praise strategies and avoidance of linguistic diversity, the AI tutor becomes a digital actor in the ongoing negotiation of language, identity, and power. Its authority stems not from its expertise or empathy, but from its repetition of institutional norms embedded in data and code.

These insights call for a more critical approach to the integration of AI into language education. While AI tutors may be helpful for basic feedback and repetition-based learning, they risk narrowing learners' experiences and identities if their discursive frameworks go unexamined. Designers, educators, and researchers must remain attentive to the politics of language in machine-mediated instruction.

Implications

The research illustrates various implications for future research and development:

Pedagogical Design: Developers of AI language tools should seriously consider the multilingual awareness, cross-cultural pragmatics, and usage of varieties of English in their training data and feedback logic.

Teacher Mediation: Teachers can play an important mediating role in which they support learners in interpreting feedback from AI as just one source of feedback—not an authoritative source.

Ethical Use: When institutions adopt AI tools, they should develop guidelines for teachers and learners that emphasize transparency, learner autonomy, and respect for the multitude of languages and the diversity of uses of English.

Critical Literacy: Students need to be empowered with the tools to question the feedback they are presented with, not just accept it, so that students develop metalinguistic awareness and critical awareness of their learning.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its small, purpose-built corpus and focus on a single AI system. Further research might expand the dataset, compare multiple AI platforms, or include real learner interactions. Longitudinal studies could examine how repeated exposure to AI feedback shapes learner beliefs, identity, and writing practices over time.

Additionally, there is scope for interdisciplinary collaboration between applied linguists, AI developers, and educational theorists to co-create systems that reflect a wider range of linguistic and pedagogical values.

Final Reflection

AI tutors are not teachers, but they increasingly teach. They do so not through human experience or social dialogue, but through patterned language that reflects deeply entrenched educational and ideological systems. This article argues that these systems must be interrogated, not only for their linguistic content but for their cultural assumptions and pedagogical consequences.

As educators and researchers in a time of technological transformation, we must ask: What kind of English do we want our learners to encounter? What kinds of voices do we want them to hear—and to develop? And what happens when those voices are shaped not by people, but by patterns of language generated in silence?

Only by critically engaging these questions can we ensure that AI in education supports—not constrains—the diverse, dialogic, and democratic potential of language learning.

Future research should explore AI-human collaborative pedagogies and multilingual design to mitigate ideological biases.

References

Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. Journal of Education Policy, 18(2), 215–228.

Bender, E. M., Gebru, T., McMillan-Major, A., & Mitchell, M. (2021). On the dangers of stochastic parrots: Can language models be too big? Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (pp. 610–623). ACM.

Biesta, G. (2006). Beyond learning: Democratic education for a human future. Paradigm Publishers.

Canagarajah, S. (2013). Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations. Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (1992). Discourse and social change. Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Longman.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. Herder & Herder.

Giroux, H. A. (2004). The terror of neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the eclipse of democracy. Routledge.

Gray, J. (2010). The construction of English: Culture, consumerism and promotion in the ELT global coursebook. Palgrave Macmillan.

Holmes, W., Bialik, M., & Fadel, C. (2019). Artificial intelligence in education: Promises and implications for teaching and learning. Center for Curriculum Redesign.

Luckin, R., Holmes, W., Griffiths, M., & Forcier, L. B. (2016). Intelligence unleashed: An argument for AI in education. Pearson Education.

Mercer, N. (2000). Words and minds: How we use language to think together. Routledge.

Pennycook, A. (2001). Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction. Routledge.

Phillipson, R. (1992). Linguistic imperialism. Oxford University Press.

Selwyn, N. (2014). Distrusting educational technology: Critical questions for changing times. Routledge.

Shohamy, E. (2001). The power of tests: A critical perspective on the uses of language tests. Pearson Education.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. Discourse & Society, 4(2), 249–283.

Walsh, S. (2006). Investigating classroom discourse. Routledge.

Weller, M. (2020). 25 years of ed tech. Athabasca University Press.

Williamson, B. (2017). Big data in education: The digital future of learning, policy and practice. SAGE.

Wodak, R. (1996). Disorders of discourse. Longman.

Zawacki-Richter, O., Marín, V. I., Bond, M., & Gouverneur, F. (2019). Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education – Where are the educators? International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 16(1), 1–27.