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Authentic Materials vs. Pedagogical Texts: Enhancing Pragmatic Competence in English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

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ABSTRACT

The integration of pragmatic competence into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction remains a persistent challenge, particularly when instructors must balance the complexity of authentic materials with the accessibility of pedagogical texts. While authentic texts provide rich exposure to real-world communicative norms, implicatures, and discourse markers, they often overwhelm learners who lack sufficient linguistic foundational skills. Conversely, simplified pedagogical texts, increasingly generated by artificial intelligence, risk stripping away crucial contextual nuances, potentially resulting in flat or pragmatically deficient language exposure. This paper explores the intersection of authentic materials and pedagogical texts in EAP contexts, investigating how generative AI can be leveraged to scaffold authentic content without sacrificing its pragmatic depth. By proposing a novel methodological framework that dynamically adapts authentic discourse for varying levels of pragmatic competence, this study aims to optimize EAP instruction while mitigating the risks of artificial or overly literal language generation.

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence, defined as the ability to understand and produce language appropriately within specific social and academic contexts, is an essential skill for learners in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs. EAP students are expected not only to master grammar and vocabulary but also to navigate complex academic discourse, including making inferences, understanding presuppositions, and interpreting nuanced arguments. Traditionally, EAP curricula have relied on a dichotomy of reading materials: authentic texts authored by field experts, and pedagogical texts explicitly designed or simplified for language learners. The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly disrupted this landscape, enabling educators to instantly generate massive volumes of pedagogical materials. However, this shift raises critical questions about the quality of the linguistic input, particularly regarding whether such AI-generated content serves as a beneficial pedagogical scaffold or merely as low-quality "AI slop" that fails to foster genuine pragmatic understanding (Woo et al., 202G).

Despite ongoing innovations in language pedagogy, existing approaches to developing pragmatic competence in EAP remain insufficient for several reasons. First, traditional pedagogical texts often oversimplify academic discourse, systematically removing the complex discourse connectives and implicit communicative cues that students must ultimately master to succeed in higher education. Second, the uncritical adoption of standard AI models to generate reading materials often yields texts that rely on shallow pattern matching rather than genuine semantic or pragmatic reasoning, inadvertently teaching students overly literal interpretations of academic language (Azin et al., 202G). To address these persistent challenges, a more nuanced approach is required to bridge the gap between authentic complexity and pedagogical accessibility.

To this end, this paper introduces a structured framework designed to enhance EAP instruction through the careful curation and AI-assisted adaptation of authentic materials. The primary contributions of this paper are as follows:

We propose a structured methodology for using generative AI to scaffold authentic academic texts, dynamically preserving pragmatic features while adjusting syntactic complexity to suit EAP learners. We outline a comprehensive, hypothetical evaluation plan to assess the impact of this framework on students' pragmatic comprehension, contrasting it with traditional pedagogical reading practices.

2. Related Work

2.1 Pragmatic Competence in Artificial Intelligence

The first critical area of related work concerns the evaluation of pragmatic competence within the large language models (LLMs) used to generate educational materials. Researchers have increasingly scrutinized whether models can handle complex pragmatic phenomena, such as presupposition projection in conditional sentences or the appropriate use of discourse connectives (Azin et al., 202G)(Pandia et al., 2021). While base models show some sensitivity to pragmatic cues, chain-of-thought prompting can sometimes encourage overly literal interpretations that hinder effective pragmatic inference (Park et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies have identified a listener-speaker asymmetry in LLMs, revealing that these models often perform substantially better when judging the appropriateness of a text than they do when generating pragmatically nuanced language themselves (Sieker & Zarrieß, 202G). In contrast to these prior works that primarily focus on benchmarking LLM capabilities, our study applies these insights directly to EAP pedagogy, ensuring that AI generation tools are heavily guided to avoid generating pragmatically flat pedagogical texts.

2.2 Artificial Intelligence in EAP Pedagogy

A second major subtopic involves the broader integration of artificial intelligence within EAP courses, focusing on student interaction and the quality of AI-generated media. The rapid advancement of AI has prompted educators to explore Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) tools to create customized multimedia course materials, though concerns remain regarding whether these materials enhance learning or merely dilute academic rigor (Woo et al., 202G). Additionally, the psychological factors surrounding AI use in EAP have been explored, indicating that students require high psychological safety and supportive teacher practices to navigate AI tools transparently and ethically (Du & He, 202G). While these studies offer valuable insights into the systemic integration and student perceptions of AI in EAP, they often lack a specific focus on linguistic pragmatics. Our framework builds upon this foundation by ensuring that the integration of AI explicitly targets the enhancement of pragmatic skills rather than merely increasing the volume of available learning materials.

2.3 Alignment and Assessment of Pragmatic Levels

The final category of related work focuses on the assessment of pragmatic levels and the alignment of communication strategies. Research indicates that matching the levels of reasoning between communication partners creates a more beneficial environment for language learning, demonstrating that learning from explicit, literal language can be advantageous as an initial stepping stone (Naszadi et al., 2024). To formalize the assessment of AI in educational settings, frameworks like the EAP-AIAS have been proposed, providing a structured scale for integrating GenAI into EAP assessments while maintaining academic integrity (Roe et al., 2024). Although these evaluation frameworks provide excellent guardrails for general AI use, they do not prescribe specific instructional mechanisms for transitioning students from literal comprehension to advanced pragmatic reasoning. The current work fills this gap by utilizing explicit structural scaffolds to systematically bridge the divide between pedagogical text simplicity and authentic text complexity.

3. Method/Approach

To effectively harness the benefits of authentic materials while mitigating their overwhelming complexity, we propose the Pragmatic Enhancement via Authentic AI Scaffolding (PEAAS) framework. This approach utilizes large language models not as mere text generators, but as dynamic pedagogical mediators that adjust the cognitive load of texts while preserving essential pragmatic features. The core design choice is to avoid generating entirely synthetic texts, which often lack the natural pragmatic depth of human communication. Instead, the framework relies on adapting existing, high-quality authentic academic publications, ensuring that genuine communicative intentions, implicatures, and presuppositions remain intact.

The PEAAS framework operates through a structured, three-step pipeline designed to be implemented by EAP practitioners. The numbered pipeline is defined as follows:

- Source Selection and Pragmatic Mapping: The instructor inputs an authentic academic text into the system. The model identifies and tags key pragmatic features, such as advanced discourse connectives, hedging, and presuppositional triggers, establishing a baseline of pragmatic density.
- Pedagogical Scaffolding Generation: The AI generates an adapted version of the text. Crucially, rather than simplifying the text by removing pragmatic markers, the system provides integrated "pragmatic glosses"—margin notes, explicit literal translations, and guided questions that explain the author's underlying intentions.
- Progressive Fading: As the learner progresses through the EAP course, the system gradually reduces

the frequency of explicit scaffolding, forcing the learner to rely on their developing pragmatic reasoning skills to interpret the unmodified authentic texts.

To evaluate the efficacy of the PEAAS framework, we propose a hypothetical evaluation plan utilizing a mixed-methods experimental design. We will construct a synthetic benchmark dataset comprising 500 academic reading passages, paired with corresponding multiple-choice and open-ended questions designed to test pragmatic inference rather than mere factual recall. A cohort of EAP students will be divided into two groups: a control group utilizing standard, AI-simplified pedagogical texts, and an experimental group using the PEAAS framework. We hypothesize that while both groups will perform equally well on literal comprehension tasks, the experimental group will demonstrate significantly higher accuracy in resolving implicatures and interpreting authorial stance, mirroring the way pragmatic competence emerges through carefully aligned reasoning levels (Naszadi et al., 2024).

4. Discussion

The practical implications of deploying the PEAAS framework in EAP classrooms are substantial, offering a scalable method for individualized language instruction. By shifting the role of AI from a generator of simplified content to an interactive scaffold for authentic texts, institutions can provide learners with high-quality academic exposure without overwhelming them. Furthermore, this approach aligns with modern pedagogical theories that emphasize the importance of context-dependent meaning, preparing students for the rigorous communicative demands of university-level research and collaboration. Implementing this framework requires robust institutional support, including training for EAP instructors to critically evaluate AI-generated scaffolding and ensure it does not inadvertently introduce hallucinations or misinterpretations.

Despite its potential, this proposed approach faces several notable limitations and potential failure modes. First, the framework relies heavily on the underlying LLM's ability to accurately identify and explain nuanced pragmatic features, which is problematic given that current models often struggle with high-level pragmatic cues compared to human performance (Pandia et al., 2021). Second, EAP students with lower-level language proficiencies might still find the sheer cognitive load of authentic texts overwhelming, even with extensive AI-generated margin glosses and scaffolds. Third, the subjective nature of human pragmatic evaluation means that

assessing the exact improvement in a student's pragmatic competence remains inherently difficult, potentially leading to inconsistencies in grading and feedback.

Ethical considerations are also paramount when integrating AI so deeply into the language learning process. There is a risk that the LLM may impose its own biased communicative norms or prioritize specific cultural interpretations of academic pragmatics, inadvertently marginalizing diverse rhetorical strategies employed by non-native speakers. Additionally, the widespread use of such tools requires transparent disclosure policies to ensure EAP students clearly understand the boundary between authentic human authorship and AI-mediated pedagogical interventions, thereby preserving academic integrity (Du & He, 202G).

Future work should explore several promising avenues to build upon this framework. Researchers should investigate longitudinal studies tracking EAP students over multiple semesters to determine if the pragmatic skills acquired through AI-scaffolded authentic texts successfully transfer to their independent academic writing and seminar participation. Additionally, future iterations of this research should expand beyond text-based materials to include multimodal pragmatic evaluations, analyzing how well AI models can scaffold audio-visual authentic materials like recorded academic lectures or debates.

5. Conclusion

The tension between the complexity of authentic academic texts and the accessibility of pedagogical materials represents a central challenge in EAP instruction. While generative AI offers unprecedented tools for scaling educational content, its tendency to produce pragmatically flat or overly literal texts risks depriving learners of the nuanced communicative exposure necessary for academic success. By reframing the use of AI as a tool for scaffolding rather than wholesale generation, educators can maintain the integrity of authentic discourse while providing the explicit guidance learners need to develop high-level pragmatic reasoning.

The proposed Pragmatic Enhancement via Authentic AI Scaffolding (PEAAS) framework offers a systematic approach to bridging this gap, ensuring that EAP students are exposed to vital pragmatic features like implicatures and discourse connectives in a manageable format. Moving forward, the careful, ethically informed integration of such technologies will be crucial in fostering EAP environments where students not only decode literal meanings but fully engage with the rich, context-dependent nature of academic communication. Through rigorous evaluation and continuous refinement,

AI-enhanced pedagogy can evolve from producing mere educational content to cultivating genuine pragmatic competence.

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