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What ChatGPT Threatens and Enables: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ChatGPT and other generative AI likely constitute the most significant technology in recent years to affect writing studies, and their impact has been widely discussed in public (Rudolph, Tan, & Tan, 2023). The technology is still too new and still too fast evolving to have any consensus on how to use it, how to manage it, how to regulate it, or how to guide its future development, but the proponents tout AI's potential to ease the tedium of writing, enhance the student's learning experience, and ease the teacher workload, while the critics fear its effect on plagiarism, human relationships, and unemployment, among others. These hopes and fears are both legitimate, and we need to continue public conversations about what to do with this technology because it will affect all of us, and each of us should have a say in forming a public consensus. This presentation seeks to clarify some of the issues in this debate by conducting a theoretical analysis of AI-generated text from a pragmatic perspective. "Writing" is not just about generating texts, and "writer" is not always the person who generated the text. Conceptual tools, such as speech act theory (Austin, 1975), performance theory (Goffman, 1959), and writer identity theory (Ivanič, 1998) can show us what specific aspects of writing are affected by AI, how AI tools change the nature of social action that results from it, how our understanding of "writing" must change as a result, and what it may mean to study and teach writing in the near future.

References

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