

Introduction to Special Issue: The notion of authenticity in hybrid human/AI productions

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This special issue of *AI-Linguistica* took root amidst the fulgurant and seemingly ubiquitous adoption of commercial generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and large language models (LLMs) by the general public, the advent of which has forced linguists and other scholars to revisit our knowledge of meaning production, reception, and perception, in particular via text. In these pages we examine how the notion of authenticity is maintained, transformed, or redefined within hybrid human/AI textual and multimodal productions. Why this collection? Firstly, such scrutiny allows us to reposition “AI” to its correct place, that of a powerful, but lifeless assembly of algorithms. The term AI, *Artificial Intelligence* has been widely adopted as a catch-all term by both the general public and governmental institutions, however, GenAI and LLMs do not possess the quality, nor the complexity of thought and cognition of the sort promised by the still elusive *Artificial General Intelligence*. Secondly, it is a lens which provides pertinent evaluations of these advanced tools, and how we perceive and apprehend them; and as linguists, it is a heuristic that renders visible otherwise intangible processes, providing new insights into questions surrounding intention, function, authorship, style, perception, cognition, didactics, etc., questions that have perdured since long before these models even existed. Finally, the notion of authenticity has always been linked to the written word, not only as authorship in the sense of intellectual property of say a poem or a recipe, but as an artifact of the person who created the semiosis, a spatio-temporal marker of living breathing human existence via a sign etched into a rock, a hand against a cave wall, a beautifully penned signature, all signifying an individual, and that signification’s legible authenticity.

Authenticity is etymologically grounded in the Greek *authentikos*, from *authentēs* (‘doer’, ‘master’), itself composed of *autos* (‘self’) and *hentes* (‘one who acts’). The term thus encodes, at its root, a relation between selfhood and action that continues to structure contemporary debates. Beyond simple authorship, the semantic field of authenticity is existentially rich: truth, genuineness, originality, sincerity, integrity, identity, credibility, trustworthiness, legitimacy, and heritage. It is a fundamental notion tackled since antiquity, and there exist several definitions of authenticity that have come to us through the ages, each serving slightly different purposes.

As per Tomas and Das (2022), three main interpretations of authenticity emerge across disciplines. The first, rooted in philosophical traditions from Ancient

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Greece to twentieth-century critical theory, defines authenticity as *the alignment between an entity's internal ideals and its external expression*. The second, drawing on cognitive science categorization, schemas and socio-institutional categories, defines authenticity as *adherence to the norms of a social category*. The third, grounded in psychological essentialism and semiotics, defines authenticity as *a relation linking an entity to a person, place, or time*. These interpretations inform many of the frameworks developed in the following papers.

The eight articles published in this special issue tackle the notion of authenticity through the lens of *hybridity*. The term *hybrid* here refers to the dynamic interaction between human agents and artificial intelligence systems, in which the production of language results from distributed co-agency between human cognition and algorithmic computation, whether in language sciences (Beguš et al. 2023; De Cesare 2023; Dynel 2023; Meier 2024; Weissweiler 2025) translation studies (Li, Rao, Shang et al. 2025; Xu et al. 2025) literary/narratology studies (Beguš 2024; Chakrabarty, Laban, Agarwal et al. 2024; Koivisto and Grassini 2024) discursivity/discourse analysis (Merton 1968; Yoo et al. 2024; Liu et al. 2025; Cohn, Snyder, Montenegro et al. 2024) NLP/computational linguistics (Liu et al. 2024) didactics (Petkovic and Alrahabi 2022; Ifelebuegu 2024; Werdiningsih, Marzuki, Inda et al. 2024) or cognition (Carrasco-Farre 2024; Grindrod 2024; Wang, Zhang and Seedhouse 2025).

The need for a dedicated special issue is also explained by the layered and complex nature of the problem. During a fittingly hybrid *Journée d'Etudes* of the same name at the Université de Lorraine on 13/03/2025¹, which brought together scholars from several countries and fields, it soon became apparent that questions surrounding authenticity in hybrid human/AI productions are inherently multifaceted, if not interdisciplinary, and that an appropriate scholarly response therefore needs to engage to some degree with interdisciplinarity. Within linguistics in particular, these questions connect with work on discourse practices, minority languages, pragmatics, corpus analysis, second-language acquisition, embodiment, etc., which is why a dedicated call for this special issue was launched, allowing us to receive dozens of propositions, and to retain only eight.

The notion of authenticity is linked to those of identity and truth. Today, it is being reconfigured in the context of hybrid productions between humans and artificial intelligence. While the general public tends to perceive artificial intelligence as a whole greater than the sum of its parts, it is important to recall that this gestalt—referring merely to the generative capacity of computational models LLMs—does not produce language grounded in embodied experience, but rather draws on billions of tokens from disparate sources (Zhao et al. 2023) often collected without authorization (Baack et al. 2025). In other words, these productions are amalgams of signs, symbols, or images, resulting from statistical calculations and not from lived experiences or embodied reflections. The

authenticity of hybrid productions is an issue that brings together cognitivists and generativists. Lakoff (1986) contrasted computational production and human production, rejecting the computer-brain model, and according to Chomsky, Roberts, and Watumull (2023) “we know from the science of linguistics and the philosophy of knowledge that they differ profoundly from how humans reason and use language”.

In order to apply any analysis of authenticity to the examination of hybrid productions, we must first critically interrogate the very meaning of authenticity. To do so, we draw on an epistemic framework that predates the emergence of LLMs. For a more comprehensive introduction to the notion of authenticity, we suggest Lindholm (2013). Trilling (1978), frames the evolution of authenticity as a derivation from sincerity. Handler (1986) argues that authenticity is not an innate property, but a discursive construction mobilized, for example, by nationalists to assuage anxieties around continuity and legitimation. Linnekin (1991), drawing on a Maori case-study, shows that so-called “authentic” traditions are in fact dynamic, interpreted, and politically invested: authenticity becomes a narrative rather than a reproduction of empirical reality. Lindholm (2013), addressing authenticity in the digital era—prior to the emergence of LLMs—in the context of early online banking and other official forms of digital authentication, writes: “Anxiety about the validity of experience and about the maintenance of personal identity is at the core of this computerized definition.” Drawing on linguistic and semiotic frameworks, van Leeuwen (2001) offers several responses to the question, “What is authenticity?” He observes that media tend to reproduce and reinforce the idea that authenticity is concealed behind masks, only to be revealed in order to produce an effect of realism within a saturated media landscape. This highlights the paradox of authenticity in late modernity: it must appear spontaneous, even though it is often carefully assembled [...]

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The contributions are organised into two thematic sections that approach authenticity in hybrid productions from complementary perspectives.

Part I, *Ideologies, reproductions, and circulations*, opens with Bradley and Palomares, who propose a conceptual framework reconciling authenticity and *syntheticity* by positioning them along a continuum rather than treating them as binary opposites. Their model distinguishes between the technological origin of a production and its social reception, thereby providing an analytical tool for understanding the complex validation states that characterise hybrid texts. Maurel then turns to the question of style, examining how authorial legitimacy is negotiated within hybrid writing processes involving large language models. By proposing a categorisation of hybrid textual productions based on the origin of textual material, the direction of stylistic modification, and the distribution of authorial intervention, the article highlights the role of human editorial endorsement in the authentication of style. Kalwa approaches authenticity through the lens of digital communication, analysing discourse surrounding deepfake videos circulated on social media. Through close analysis of online commentary, their study demonstrates how

audiences mobilise expectations of authenticity and respond to perceived anomalies when evaluating the credibility of mediated representations. The first section concludes with Acero Ayuda and Yebra López, who examine the Ladino-speaking chatbot *Estreyika* as a sociolinguistic site where authenticity is negotiated among heritage speakers, learners, and cultural outsiders. Their analysis highlights how authenticity operates not as a fixed property of linguistic production but as a positional and ideological construct shaped by community practices and language revitalisation efforts.

Part II, *Cognition, social interaction, and the co-construction of meaning*, opens with Robert and Sauvage, who investigate the use of generative AI in the production of simplified clinical texts intended for families in paediatric emergency care. Drawing on ethnographic observation, interviews with medical professionals, and corpus analysis, the study reveals how the perceived authenticity of generated texts depends on their alignment with established institutional discourse practices and on the corrective labour required to appropriate machine-generated output. Pallanti and Chaker approach the distinction between human and AI-generated discourse through the framework of enaction theory, proposing sentence-length variance as a quantitative indicator of the irregular perception–action coupling characteristic of human cognition. Their findings suggest measurable structural differences between human and machine-produced texts, while also revealing the limits of current generative models in reproducing human linguistic variability. Merino Hernández and Ariano Cifuentes examine perceptions of authenticity in human–computer interaction through an experimental study of positive politeness strategies in Spanish-language chatbot interactions. Their results show that conversational cues such as opening comments and follow-up questions significantly shape perceptions of authenticity, while emojis may reduce the perceived naturalness of interaction. The section concludes with Burnett’s investigation of embodiment in French human, AI-generated, and hybrid texts. By analysing linguistic markers associated with *ecognition*, the study proposes an embodiment scale designed to measure the proximity between textual production and embodied human experience, offering a novel methodological approach for examining humanity in hybrid discourse.

Taken together, the contributions in this special issue highlight the importance of authenticity in hybrid human/AI productions as an object of study; one that requires careful apprehension in order to locate and to gauge its behaviour within hybridity, which is not some neat median solid and fixed state between opposing humans and machines. Rather, it flows through more or less condensed and diluted states *borne upon and bearing* linguistic, cognitive, and social material. Such a convergence of theoretical models and applied analyses across diverse

linguistic and social contexts affords this issue a unique analytical vantage point from which to grasp authenticity as a means and an end.

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