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Navigating the New Frontier: An Analysis of Applied Linguistics Journals' Editorial Policies on AI Use in Scientific Publishing

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence tools, such as large language models, has influenced various industries, and scientific publishing is no exception. The adoption of AI in academic research has raised serious practical and ethical concerns, urging scientific publishing committees to reconsider their ethical and practical publishing policies. Although many journals now provide editorial guidelines on AI use, there is still significant variability in their content and accessibility. In this article, we analyse the editorial policies of the top 50 applied linguistics journals to find the ethical and practical uses of AI in applied linguistics publications. Thematic analysis was combined with content analysis to systematically examine the presence or absence of recurring themes in the AI-related policies of the selected journals. Six themes were identified for analysis: authorship, complete rejection of AI, ethical AI use, transparency and disclosure, data integrity, and adaptability of policies. Descriptive statistics were used to quantify the frequencies of each theme and identify variations across journals and their respective publishers. This study's findings underscore the need for clear, standardised policies governing AI use to ensure ethical practices and foster trust among researchers, publishers, and the broader scientific community.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last decade has witnessed significant advances in artificial intelligence (AI), creating several AI-based tools. Some of these tools are used in scientific research, but their use still raises concerns among researchers and publishers alike. The launch of ChatGPT on 30 November 2022 was the upsurge of this new technology. The natural language processing capabilities and the wide range of applications of ChatGPT have attracted numerous users from various backgrounds. This rapid growth, according to Dai et al. (2024), was influenced by technological innovation, user experience optimisation, effective marketing, and social media support. As early adopters, university students are specifically influenced by factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, ease of use, observability, and trialability (Raman et al., 2023). The widespread adoption of AI in academic contexts urged the need for proactive solutions to prevent unethical practices and ensure responsible use.

Many AI-detection tools that claim to detect AI-generated texts are already available online in an attempt to detect cases of academic misconduct. Recently, Turnitin, the parent

company of the widely used similarity check service iThenticate, launched its service for AI-generated text detection in April 2023. However, many studies have found that these tools are neither accurate nor reliable, yielding both false positives and negatives (Anderson et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Weber-Wulff et al., 2023). These studies suggested that the effectiveness of these tools in detecting AI-generated texts remains limited. Even the companies providing AI-detection services admit the limitations of their tools. Turnitin, for example, states that punitive decisions should not be based solely on its tool's results (Turnitin, 2023). Therefore, the need to determine AI tools' ethical uses in scientific publications urged many journals and publishers to update their editorial policies to include guidance on AI use.

The ethical use of AI in scientific research has been an ongoing discussion among researchers and editors. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), an organization that informs about ethics in scientific publications, released its position statement regarding the use of AI in scientific publications in February 2023 to address inconsistency among journals and publishers (Vasquez, 2024). COPE's position statement generally allows AI in manuscript preparation with certain limitations. First, AI tools cannot be listed as authors as they cannot take responsibility for the submitted work, assert the presence or absence of conflicts of interest, or manage copyright agreements (COPE, 2023). Moreover, authors are required to describe AI use in the methods or acknowledgement section and take full responsibility for their work (Inam et al., 2024). Many journals endorsed the COPE's statement in their editorial policies. However, the statement failed to provide comprehensive guidelines on AI use in scientific publishing (Ganjavi et al., 2024).

Recent studies have examined the emerging policies of academic publishers and journals regarding the use of AI tools in scientific publications. Studies have found that only 24% of top publishers and 87% of highly ranked journals provide guidance on generative AI use (Ganjavi et al., 2024). Even among the publishers and journals that provide guidelines on AI use, there is significant variability in their content and accessibility (Ganjavi et al., 2024). Content analysis of journal policies reveals inconsistencies in AI-related guidelines for authors (Zhang & Charbonneau, 2024). Most policies prohibit including AI as an author and require disclosure of AI use, but specifics on where and how to disclose vary (Flanagin et al., 2023; Ganjavi et al., 2024; Inam et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2023). There is a consensus that human authorship remains paramount, with AI tools permitted in supportive roles (Gelfand et al., 2023; Perkins & Roe, 2024). Generally, publishers' guidelines regarding AI in scientific publication are to use it responsibly, disclose its use, and ensure the accuracy and integrity of the work (Mondal et al., 2025). However, the heterogeneity in policies, even among affiliated publishers and journals, creates challenges for authors and may limit regulatory effectiveness (Ganjavi et al., 2024).

Other studies tackled the opportunities and challenges of integrating AI in the peer reviewing process. While AI can enhance efficiency and objectivity in manuscript screening and reviewer selection (Calamur & Ghosh, 2024), concerns arise regarding potential biases, transparency, and the need for ethical guidelines (Schintler et al., 2023). Mollaki (2024) raised the ethical and social concerns surrounding the use of AI in peer review, stating that these practices could compromise the integrity of the process and necessitate a critical assessment of its legitimacy. As AI technologies continue to evolve, there is a need for standardised guidelines to protect scientific integrity and avoid confusion in the scientific community (Ganjavi et al., 2024; Mollaki, 2024).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1.Sample Selection and Data Acquisition

This study aims to investigate applied linguistics journals' policies on AI use in scientific publications. Using Scimago.org (https://www.scimagojr.com), a sample of the top 50 applied linguistics journals was selected on February 15, 2025, based on the SJR (Scientific Journal Rankings) metric. The SJR metric considers both the number of citations received and the journals' prestige and is considered more stable than the impact factor. The selected journals comprise a mix of 8 open-access (16%) and 42 subscription-based journals (84%). These journals are published by sixteen well-known publishers across four countries: the US, the UK, the Netherlands, and Poland.

Table 1: 50 applied linguistics journals in the research sample.

N	Journals	Publishers	SJR
1	Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics	MIT Press Journals	4.006/ Q1
2	Artificial Intelligence Review	Springer Netherlands	3.260/ Q1
3	Communication Research	SAGE Publications Inc.	2.943/ Q1
4	Journal of Communication	Wiley-Blackwell	2.658/ Q1
5	Journal of Second Language Writing	Elsevier Ltd	2.606/ Q1
6	Computer-Assisted Language Learning	Taylor and Francis Ltd.	2.370 /Q1
7	Modern Language Journal	Wiley-Blackwell	2.259/ Q1
8	Research on Language and Social Interaction	Taylor and Francis Ltd.	2.258/ Q1
9	Studies in Second Language Acquisition	Cambridge University Press	2.124 /Q1
10	System	Elsevier Ltd	2.075 /Q1
11	Artificial Intelligence	Elsevier B.V.	2.042 /Q1
12	Human Communication Research	Wiley-Blackwell	2.034 /Q1
13	Journal of Memory and Language	Academic Press Inc.	1.942 /Q1
14	Language Learning	Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd	1.908 /Q1
15	TESOL Quarterly	Wiley-Blackwell	1.888 /Q1
16	Applied Linguistics	Oxford University Press	1.854 /Q1
17	Journal of Semantics	Oxford University Press	1.805/ Q1
18	Assessing Writing	Elsevier Ltd	1.786/ Q1
19	Language Testing	SAGE Publications Ltd	1.752/ Q1
20	Language Teaching Research	SAGE Publications Ltd	1.738 /Q1
21	Communication Theory	Wiley-Blackwell	1.679 /Q1
22	Language, Culture, and Curriculum	Taylor and Francis Ltd.	1.667 /Q1
23	Mind and Language	Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd	1.626 /Q1
24	Neurobiology of Language	MIT Press Journals	1.608 /Q1
25	Translation Spaces(Netherland)	John Benjamins Publishing Company	1.607 /Q1
26	Critical Inquiry in Language Studies	Routledge	1.593 /Q1
27	Cognition	Elsevier B.V.	1.590 /Q1
28	Journal of English for Academic Purposes	Elsevier B.V.	1.589 /Q1
29	Language Teaching	Cambridge University Press	1.568 /Q1

30	Interpreting	John Benjamins Publishing Company	1.550 /Q1
31	Research Methods in Applied Linguistics	Elsevier B.V.	1.537 /Q1
32	ELT Journal	Oxford University Press	1.523 /Q1
33	ReCALL	Cambridge University Press	1.493 /Q1
34	Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching	Adam Mickiewicz University Press	1.455 /Q1
35	Bilingualism	Cambridge University Press	1.425 /Q1
36	Cognitive Psychology	Academic Press Inc.	1.419 /Q1
37	Annual Review of Applied Linguistics	Cambridge University Press	1.386 /Q1
38	European Journal of Communication	SAGE Publications Ltd	1.380 /Q1
39	Computational Communication Research	Amsterdam University Press	1.370 /Q1
40	Computational Linguistics	MIT	1.367 /Q1
41	International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism	Taylor and Francis Ltd.	1.341 /Q1
42	RELC Journal	SAGE Publications Ltd	1.333 /Q1
43	Annual Review of Linguistics	Annual Reviews Inc.	1.322 /Q1
44	Second Language Research	SAGE Publications Ltd	1.315 /Q1
45	International Journal of Multilingualism	Routledge	1.274 /Q1
46	Communication Monographs	Routledge	1.261 /Q1
47	Journal of Language and Social Psychology	SAGE Publications Inc.	1.246 /Q1
48	Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching	Taylor and Francis Ltd.	1.245 /Q1
49	Natural Language and Linguistic Theory	Springer Netherlands	1.224 /Q1
50	Open Mind	MIT Press Journals	1.224/ Q1

Journals' official websites were manually searched for guidelines pertaining to AI in journals' editorial guidelines, submission policies, and ethical statements between 15 and 20 February 2025. If a journal did not provide AI guidance but provided a direct link to its publisher's policy on AI, the publisher's policy was examined instead. Moreover, a direct link to COPE's position statement on AI use in scientific publications in journals or publishers' policies was also considered.

2.2.Coding Framework

This study combined content analysis with thematic analysis to investigate the status of AI use in Applied Linguistics Journals' policies. Content analysis and thematic analysis are two widely used methods for examining and interpreting qualitative data that share similarities but have distinct characteristics (Neuendorf, 2018). While content analysis is typically deductive and quantitative, thematic analysis is more emergent and interpretive (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The two methods are complementary, and combining them provides an in-depth understanding and measurable data (Neuendorf, 2018). Deductive data coding was used to assign a set of predetermined themes to the data. Six key themes were identified and labelled based on previous research (Ganjavi et al., 2024; Perkins & Roe, 2024). Descriptive statistics were used to quantify the percentage of recurring themes and to understand the collective stance on AI

use in scientific publications, highlighting these themes' consistency in applied linguistics journals' policies. Table 1 presents and describes these themes.

Table 2. Presentation and description of the themes of analysis.

Code	Theme	Description
1	**Authorship**	This theme explores the implications of AI tools for authorship, addressing concerns about intellectual property and responsibility.
2	**Complete Rejection of AI**	This theme captures a complete prohibition on using AI tools in submissions. It demonstrates a zero-tolerance approach towards AI-assisted content.
3	**Transparency and Disclosure**	This theme describes requirements for disclosing AI usage in writing, data collection, data analysis, etc.
4	**Ethical AI Use**	This theme pertains to expectations regarding responsible AI applications and the avoidance of misuse or bias.
5	**Data Integrity**	This theme is concerned with policies to ensure that AI does not compromise the accuracy, reliability, originality, or reproducibility of the findings.
6	**Adaptability of Policies**	This theme relates to whether applied linguistics journals explicitly state that their policies may change due to rapid advancements in AI.

3. RESULTS

The results are presented in the order of the themes outlined in the methodology section. Among the top 50 applied linguistics journals, 30 (60%) provided guidelines on the use of AI. Of these guidelines, 40% (12 cases) were found on the journals' home pages, while 60% (18 cases) came from the publishers' official websites. There were cases in which the journals provided their own AI guidance and a direct link to their publishers' policies. In many cases, journals provide only a direct link to the publishers' policies that contain AI guidance. However, there were very few instances in which journals provided AI guidance without referring to their publishers' policies. These results indicate that applied linguistics journals generally adhere to the AI policies set by their affiliated publishers. Additionally, all the journals mentioned their membership in COPE; however, none provided a direct link to its position statement on AI.

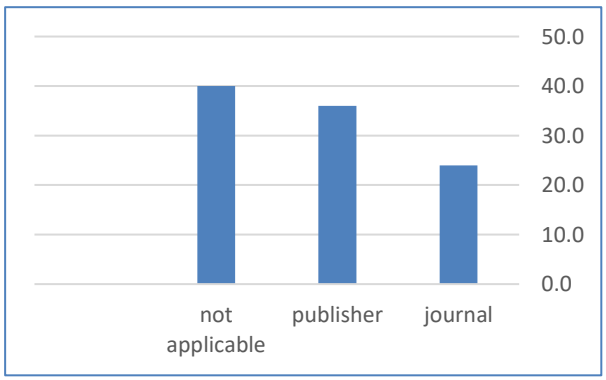

Figure 1: Top 50 applied linguistics journals –Source of AI policies (%)

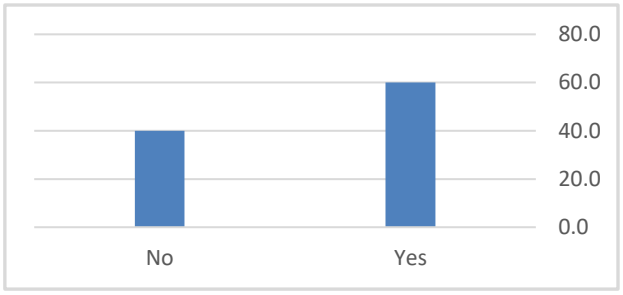

Figure 2: Top 50 applied linguistics journals – 40% providing AI guidance.

Authorship: All 30 (100%) applied linguistics journals that provided guidelines specified for AI use had specific guidelines on including AI as an author, stating that AI should not be listed as an author. Following the COPE's position, AI tools do not meet the requirements for authorship. COPE (2023) states that "as non-legal entities, [AI tools] cannot assert the presence or absence of conflicts of interest nor manage copyright and license agreements

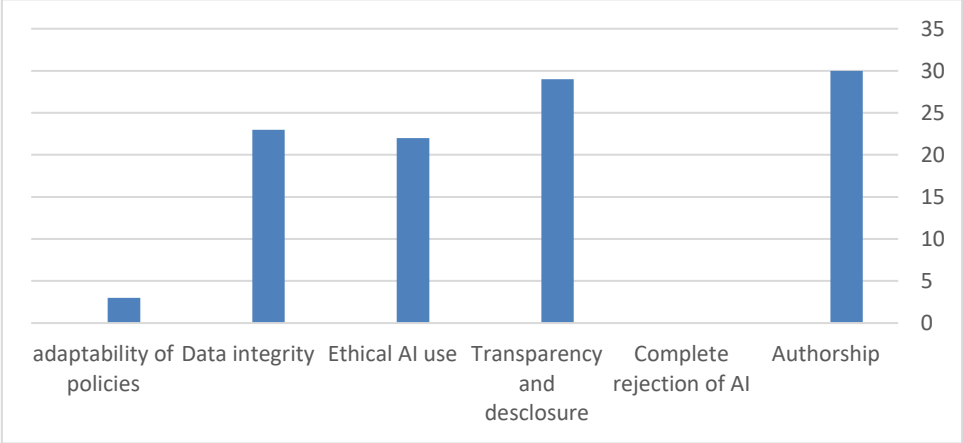

Figure 3. The top 50 applied linguistics journals- 60% (30) providing AI guidance

Complete Rejection of AI: None of the 30 applied linguistics journals ultimately rejected the use of AI tools in the submitted works, implying a general openness toward AI tools. This result suggests that AI is accepted or at least not outright dismissed by the sample of applied linguistics journals. All 30 journals that provide AI guidelines directly acknowledge the significance of AI and its potential to support authors in the research and writing process. However, some policies highlight the importance of human supervision when using AI tools, as these technologies are unable to replace human critical and creative thinking. Some journals (e.g., Elsevier's journals) do not permit the use of AI to create or alter images.

Transparency and Disclosure: Almost all the 30 journals that provide AI guidelines (96.6%) provide specific guidelines for transparency and disclosure. Authors must disclose AI in their submitted works when used to generate references, texts, images, or any other form of content. However, some policies state that assistive AI tools that provide suggestions to enhance language, grammar, references, and structure do not require disclosure. Disclosure does not mean citing AI as a primary source within the references; rather, it means declaring and describing the use of any AI tools in the methodology or similar sections. Different terms were used in disclosure guidelines, such as "disclose", "declare", describe", and

"acknowledge". These terms can be interpreted differently, and using them interchangeably may lead to confusion among authors. Some of these policies explicitly state that submissions will not be rejected due to the disclosed use of AI, but failure to do so may result in rejection. Overall, while most applied linguistics journals and their affiliated publishers emphasize the importance of disclosing AI in submitted works, the specifics of when, where, and how to disclose it remain variable.

Ethical AI Use: Out of the 30 journals that provide AI guidelines, 22 (73.3%) mention some ethical AI uses in their policies. Very few examples of these uses were mentioned in some policies, such as utilizing AI to enhance the readability and language of submitted work. AI tools used for this purpose are called assistive AI tools. Some policies emphasise that ethical dilemmas arise from AI's automatic content generation, which may lead to the incorporation of AI-generated texts into manuscripts. Others went further by declaring that all uses of AI tools are ethical as long as they do not affect the integrity, validity, and reliability of the work or as long as they are disclosed and used under human oversight. Overall, there is a lack of consistency in the ethics of AI use among applied linguistics journals' AI policies.

Data Integrity: Most applied linguistics journals' policies on AI (76.6%) include guidance on data integrity. These policies state that it is the author's responsibility to verify the accuracy and validity of AI-generated content and correct any potential errors. Authors must also be aware of the potential for plagiarism, as AI tools may reproduce substantial parts of others' works without proper citation, thereby avoiding plagiarism. Moreover, authors must be aware of the potential for fabrication where AI tools may generate incorrect, incomplete, or biased content or citations that do not exist. Finally, all guidelines on data integrity hold authors responsible for the content of their submitted works, including parts generated by AI.

Adaptability of Policies: Only three applied linguistics journals stated that their policies on AI may be revised as part of an active evaluation of AI tools. This result reflects a reactive rather than a proactive stance on AI use in scientific publication. Adaptability of policies is made necessary by the constant evolution of the AI field, the rapid adoption of AI in academic publishing, and the need for comprehensive policies to address its use. Overall, this result is a call to action, highlighting the need for clear, evolving guidance on AI use.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the policies of applied linguistics journals regarding the use of AI in academic publishing, focusing on six predetermined themes. A sample of the top 50 applied linguistics journals was selected using the SJR metric. Substantial heterogeneity was found in the guidance provided by applied linguistics journals concerning the use of AI. While some applied linguistics journals and/or their publishers offer detailed guidance on AI usage, others remain silent or vague on the topic, which may lead to confusion among applied linguistics researchers.

Although all the journals in this study's sample mentioned their membership in COPE and adherence to its ethical regulations, a significant number of applied linguistics journals (40%) did not follow suit by incorporating guidance on AI use in their editorial policies or at least referring to its position statement on AI. This result aligns with previous studies by Ganjavi et al. (2024). COPE's limited and non-prescriptive guidance on the use of AI in academic publishing contributes significantly to the inconsistency and ambiguity of journals' AI-related guidance. This lack of detailed guidance leaves individual journals and publishers

to interpret and implement AI-related policies independently, resulting in irregular guidelines. As the influence of AI grows across all stages of the research and publication process, bodies like COPE must provide more detailed guidance that highlights clear standards and best practices.

Results also indicated notable variability in the AI-related policies of applied linguistics journals, confirming results obtained by Zhang & Charbonneau (2024). Following COPE's position statement on AI in scientific publications, which primarily focused on authorship issues, the most frequently mentioned theme in the AI policies of applied linguistics journals is authorship, with explicit prohibitions on listing AI as an author. However, heterogeneity exists in areas such as the ethical use of AI, disclosure, and data integrity, blurring the lines between ethical and non-ethical uses of AI in the preparation of manuscripts. Confusion can only be resolved by establishing standardised, cross-disciplinary policies on the use of AI. This study's results highlight an urgent need to create guidelines for the use of AI through a consensus-based process that involves all stakeholders rather than just individual parties.

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