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Book Review

From GenAI Use to Empirical Inquiry. Book Review: Chapelle, C. A., Beckett, G. H., & Gray, B. E. (Eds.). (2025). *Researching Generative AI in Applied Linguistics* (304p). Iowa State University Digital Press. ISBN 978-1-958291-12-2. https://doi.org/10.31274/isudp.2025.211

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Generative AI (GenAI) refers to systems that generate language and other forms of content in response to prompts. For applied linguistics, tools such as ChatGPT have changed not only classroom practice but also the language data, interactional evidence, and assessment procedures that researchers need to examine (Hockly, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023; Law, 2024). A central question is therefore not simply whether GenAI can be used, but how its uses can be studied empirically and evaluated responsibly.

The book *Researching Generative AI in Applied Linguistics* (Chapelle et al., 2025) addresses this question through fourteen chapters based on studies presented at the 2024 Technology for Second Language Learning conference at Iowa State University. The book is organized into three parts. After an introductory chapter, Part I examines learners' uses of GenAI in writing, language learning, peer review, telecollaboration, and translation; Part II focuses on speaking assessment, AI–human scoring comparisons, test-prompt generation, and reading-test validation; and Part III investigates GenAI's language capabilities in relation to dialect variation, stance and emotion analysis, and pragmatics.

Across the book, there are three main themes: the educational value of GenAI in language learning, the evaluation of AI-generated output, and what GenAI can and cannot do as a language system.

The first concerns how GenAI contributes to language learning. Chapters 3, 4, and 7 examine this question in different learning contexts. Chapters 3 and 4 highlight prompting ability, learner engagement, and instructional scaffolding, while Chapter 7 shows that effective prompting can support culturally demanding translation tasks. Chapter 5 takes a different approach by examining observable linguistic effects and reports possible gains in sentence and lexical complexity in peer feedback. Taken together, the findings suggest that GenAI does not benefit learning automatically; its value depends on learner engagement, task design, and instructional support.

The second theme concerns the evaluation of AI-generated output. Chapters 9, 10, and 13 examine this issue through different forms of human–AI comparison, but their findings reveal important differences. Chapter 9 finds considerable agreement between ChatGPT-4 and human raters in scoring presentation content, although differences remain in score severity and some rating categories. Chapter 10 presents a relatively positive picture of AI-generated writing prompts, which were generally judged appropriate in clarity, thematic relevance, and difficulty, while noting that their ability to elicit valid test performance remains untested. Chapter 13 offers a more cautious comparison: even when ChatGPT and human coders assign the same emotion or stance category, their reasoning may differ. Taken as a whole, these studies show that similarity to human judgments is only one form of evidence; evaluating GenAI also requires attention to what is being evaluated, by what criteria, and for what purpose.

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The third theme concerns GenAI itself as a language system and its capabilities in applied linguistics. Several chapters examine GenAI performance in areas such as test development, dialect recognition, discourse analysis, and pragmatic interaction. These studies examine whether GenAI outputs demonstrate the linguistic knowledge, contextual sensitivity, and analytical abilities required for these tasks. Chapter 14, for example, highlights the challenges of treating AI interaction as equivalent to human pragmatic competence, while other studies examine whether GenAI can reliably perform tasks involving dialect recognition and discourse analysis. However, these capabilities cannot be evaluated independently of the research designs used to examine them. Across the book, studies differ in their models, prompts, tasks, datasets, and evaluation procedures, which shape how GenAI performance is interpreted. For example, Chapter 11 evaluates ChatGPT in reading-test development through case studies, whereas Chapter 13 examines AI discourse coding through comparison with human analysis and statistical measures of agreement. These studies suggest that GenAI capabilities should be understood in relation to specific tasks, linguistic contexts, and evaluation criteria rather than as general abilities.

The book's main methodological contribution is its range of empirical approaches, which combine task-specific criteria, multiple sources of evidence, and human interpretation. These approaches do not form a single research protocol but can be adapted to different questions about learner–AI interaction, assessment, and language analysis. The book's theoretical contribution takes a different form. Rather than proposing a new theory, the chapters mainly apply established theories from language learning, technology use, assessment, and discourse analysis to new human–AI contexts. These frameworks do more than provide post hoc explanations: in several chapters, they help define what counts as evidence and shape how AI-mediated activity is analyzed. Dynamic Assessment, for example, frames learner–ChatGPT interaction in Chapter 2, while assessment validation frameworks guide the evaluation of AI-generated test materials in Chapters 10 and 11. The book's theoretical value therefore lies mainly in extending and testing established applied linguistics frameworks in emerging human–AI contexts.

However, this contribution also has a theoretical boundary. Although they provide useful foundations for individual studies, their connections across chapters remain limited rather than forming a unified framework for GenAI research. This absence of a broader theoretical framework represents not only a boundary of the present volume but also an ongoing challenge for GenAI research in applied linguistics.

A second boundary concerns disciplinary focus. The book makes a clear contribution to GenAI research in language learning, assessment, and the study of AI's language capabilities, but those wishing to explore other areas of applied linguistics may benefit from consulting more specialized publications. *Translation Studies in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (Sun et al., 2025), for example, approaches GenAI from the perspective of translation studies, with particular attention to students' translation competence, translation teaching, and ethical issues surrounding AI use. While translation in the present book is represented mainly by the study of humor translation in Chapter 7, Sun et al. (2025) provide a more sustained treatment of how GenAI is reshaping translation education and practice. For a less explored area of GenAI research in applied linguistics, *Artificial Intelligence and Discourse (Vol. 2)* (Karamifar & Valente, 2026) shifts attention to discourse and communication, examining how AI shapes language, identity, representation, and professional communication across different social contexts. This provides a complementary social and discursive perspective beyond the present book's primary focus on language learning, assessment, and AI's language capabilities.

Beyond this disciplinary focus, technological developments in GenAI also suggest new directions for extending the research presented in the book. While most chapters focus on text-based GenAI, Chapter 8 examines AI-supported speaking assessment, and Chapters 6 and 14 touch on interactional dimensions of GenAI use. Recent studies have extended this direction further. He et al. (2027), for example, investigate spoken learner–chatbot interaction in L2 oral practice, while Heilala et al. (2025) consider multimodal GenAI beyond text-to-text interaction. These developments suggest that findings tied to particular models and tasks should be interpreted within their technological contexts. Nevertheless, the volume's emphasis on task-specific criteria, multiple sources of evidence, and human interpretation remains valuable for examining emerging forms of GenAI interaction.

Overall, *Researching Generative AI in Applied Linguistics* (Chapelle et al., 2025) is a valuable contribution to the empirical study of GenAI in applied linguistics. It will be especially useful for researchers and graduate students seeking concrete examples of how learner–AI interaction, AI-assisted assessment, and GenAI language capabilities can be investigated empirically. Language teachers may also find useful ideas for writing feedback, peer review, telecollaboration, and translation, although the book is research-oriented rather than a practical teaching handbook. For language assessment specialists, its studies of AI scoring, test-prompt generation, and test validation provide useful examples of evaluating GenAI alongside human judgment and empirical evidence. The book thus provides a useful starting point for moving from GenAI use to its critical and empirical investigation.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

No AI tools were utilized for this paper.

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