

Linguistic and Stylistic Over-Elaboration in AI-Permitted Arabic Writing Tasks: Evidence from Beginner Learners

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Abstract: This study examines linguistic and stylistic over-elaboration in beginner Arabic writing produced during a classroom task permitting generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and electronic translation. The study emerged from an Arabic language course involving undergraduate accounting students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Terengganu Branch, Malaysia. Students were instructed to write a simple birthday invitation addressed to friends, using accessible vocabulary and including specified invitation elements. During the review of approximately 100 submissions, the instructor observed recurring instances of vocabulary, courtesy expressions, and sentence formulations that appeared more sophisticated or formal than expected for the learners' proficiency and the task's communicative purpose. Adopting an exploratory qualitative approach, the study draws on these professional classroom observations, supplemented by the direct examination of three available invitation texts. The analysis considers lexical overreach, stylistic over-elaboration, unnecessary syntactic complexity, register mismatch, and learner-level appropriateness. The findings highlight a pedagogical distinction between linguistic correctness and the suitability of written expression for a beginner's level and communicative situation. They also suggest that apparently sophisticated writing should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of independent linguistic proficiency. Because individual tool use and writing processes were not documented, the study does not attribute particular expressions to GenAI or establish causal effects.

Keywords: Arabic as a foreign language; beginner Arabic writing; linguistic over-elaboration; stylistic appropriateness; generative artificial intelligence; writing assessment.

Online publication: October 30, 2026

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and electronic translation tools have expanded the linguistic resources available to learners undertaking foreign-language writing tasks. These tools may assist with

vocabulary, sentence construction, and the presentation of complete texts. Yet the apparent sophistication of a submitted text does not necessarily establish that its language is appropriate to the learner's instructional level or communicative purpose. In beginner language education, this distinction deserves attention because assessment often prioritizes grammatical correctness and the completion of specified task elements.

A short personal invitation, for example, calls for intelligible information and a register suited to its audience. Formal honorifics, unusually elevated vocabulary, or unnecessarily elaborate syntax may be linguistically acceptable in other circumstances while appearing disproportionate in an invitation addressed to friends. Such choices become especially significant when the learner is at an early stage of acquiring Arabic and has been asked to use simple expressions. The concern is therefore not linguistic complexity in itself, but the relationship between complexity, communicative suitability, and expected proficiency.

The present study arose from the instructor's review of approximately 100 handwritten invitations produced by undergraduate accounting students studying beginner Arabic at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Terengganu Branch, Malaysia. Students were asked to invite friends to a birthday celebration, including the invitees' names, address, event time, opening, and closing. The instructions encouraged simple vocabulary and creativity and permitted AI tools or electronic translation. During marking, the instructor observed expressions that appeared unusually formal or sophisticated for the students' level. Three available texts provide supplementary documentary material; the larger group was not systematically coded for research.

The study examines this pedagogical concern through an exploratory qualitative interpretation of lexical, syntactic, and stylistic appropriateness. It does not attempt to determine whether individual students used digital tools or to attribute particular expressions to AI. Its contribution is to clarify why writing that appears linguistically accomplished may still require careful evaluation against the task's audience, purpose, and learner-level expectations.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: How does linguistic and stylistic over-elaboration manifest in beginner learners' Arabic invitation texts produced in a classroom task permitting digital assistance? Specifically, it examines the lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features associated with over-elaboration and considers their appropriateness in relation to the learners' expected proficiency and the communicative purpose of the invitation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Linguistic and Stylistic Appropriateness in L2 Writing

Second-language writing involves more than the production of grammatically acceptable sentences. The suitability of a text depends on its audience, purpose, genre, and the linguistic expectations of the situation. Biber and Conrad^[1] distinguish registers in relation to communicative circumstances, while Connor^[2] situates writing conventions within cross-cultural rhetorical practices. Hinkel^[3] addresses the pedagogical significance of vocabulary and grammatical choices in L2 writing. These perspectives suggest that the evaluation of beginner writing should attend not only to correctness but also to the appropriateness of selected expressions.

Pragmatic appropriateness is particularly relevant when learners write for a specific social relationship. Taguchi^[4] examines the teaching of pragmatics, providing a basis for considering whether a learner's chosen degree of politeness matches the situation. In the present study, a friendly birthday invitation offers a useful

context for examining the difference between socially suitable courtesy and excessive ceremonial formality.

2.2. Generative AI Assistance and Critical Evaluation of Written Output

Recent studies have investigated various forms of AI-supported writing. Guo and Li^[5] examine EFL learners' use of self-made chatbots for personalized writing assistance, while Ou^[6] addresses critical generative-AI literacy in academic writing. Alyasin and Shah^[7] discuss human–AI collaboration and student agency. These lines of inquiry provide relevant context for considering how learners might encounter linguistic suggestions beyond their familiar repertoire, without establishing the origin of any expression in the present classroom texts.

Han and Li^[8] examined ChatGPT-supported teacher feedback in a tertiary EFL context, extending the discussion of how generative AI may be incorporated into writing-related pedagogical support. Huang and Wang^[9] investigated Chinese EFL learners' experiences of ChatGPT as a writing collaborator, providing a relevant perspective on learner engagement with AI-supported writing. Guo^[10] investigated an AI-supported approach to peer feedback among university EFL students, highlighting feedback practices as another dimension of technology-supported writing instruction. Kim et al.^[11] further consider learner agency in collaborative writing with generative AI. These studies concern different populations and writing arrangements; none is treated here as direct evidence that AI caused over-elaboration in beginner Arabic invitations.

2.3. Beginner Arabic Writing and the Interpretation of Performance

The interpretation of digitally supported performance is particularly consequential in beginner Arabic instruction, where the distinction between an acceptable product and the learner's independently available language may be substantial. Essa^[12] proposes a stage-gated approach to allocating decision rights in AI-assisted Arabic writing; Essa^[13] proposes a framework for assessing learning after generative-AI support. Both are conceptual contributions rather than empirical validation of the present observations. Research involving beginning learners of Arabic has also examined the relationship between language anxiety, noticing, and oral production^[14], although its focus differs from the written stylistic appropriateness examined here. Together, these sources motivate attention to the fit between textual choices and beginner learning expectations rather than treating textual sophistication as a self-evident educational success.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach to examining linguistic and stylistic over-elaboration in beginner Arabic writing. It focuses on the observable characteristics of submitted texts rather than the processes through which students produced them. The analysis is informed by the instructor's classroom experience and is intended to identify forms of linguistic expression that appear disproportionate to the learners' expected proficiency and the communicative requirements of a simple writing task.

The study originated in an Arabic language course involving undergraduate accounting students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Terengganu Branch, Malaysia. The students were beginner learners of Arabic as a foreign language. They were instructed to write a short birthday invitation addressed to friends. The task required five elements: the invitees' names, the writer's address, the time of the celebration, an opening expression, and a closing expression. Students were encouraged to use simple vocabulary and

present the invitation creatively. The instructions also permitted the use of artificial intelligence tools and electronic translation.

The instructor reviewed approximately 100 submitted pieces of writing during the teaching activity and observed recurring instances of expressions that appeared more elaborate than expected for the students' level. This broader classroom observation motivated the present investigation; however, the approximately 100 submissions are not treated as a systematically coded dataset. The directly available documentary material for the exploratory analysis consists of three student invitation texts, identified as P02, P03, and P04. These texts provide a limited basis for examining specific linguistic features and cannot establish the frequency or representativeness of the phenomenon across the larger class.

The qualitative interpretation was organized around five interrelated dimensions: lexical overreach, stylistic over-elaboration, unnecessary syntactic complexity, register mismatch, and learner-level appropriateness. These dimensions served as interpretive categories rather than a validated measurement instrument or a basis for calculating feature frequencies. Lexical overreach concerns vocabulary judged unusually advanced for the instructional context. Stylistic over-elaboration includes excessive honorifics and elaborate courtesy expressions. Syntactic complexity is considered only when it appears unnecessary for communicating the invitation. Register mismatch concerns expressions whose formality is disproportionate to an invitation between friends.

Learner-level appropriateness is considered across these dimensions, drawing on the task requirements and the instructor's knowledge of the students' expected proficiency. Expressions are not classified as problematic solely because they are grammatically complex or formally correct.

The analysis distinguishes observable textual features from explanations of their origin. Although AI and translation tools were permitted, individual tool use, prompts, and revision decisions were not documented. Consequently, the study does not attribute particular expressions to AI, measure its effects, or infer individual students' independent proficiency from the submitted texts alone.

4. Findings

4.1. Linguistic Sophistication Beyond Expected Beginner Proficiency

During the review of approximately 100 classroom submissions, the instructor observed recurring instances of linguistic expression that appeared more sophisticated than expected for the students' beginner proficiency. These professional teaching observations provide the primary basis for the interpretation presented here. The three available invitation texts offer supplementary documentary context rather than a systematically representative sample of the larger collection.

This discrepancy was particularly noticeable when expressions suitable for formal correspondence appeared in writing intended as a personal invitation between friends. From the instructor's pedagogical perspective, such expressions did not adequately reflect the level of language normally expected from these learners.

4.2. Excessive Formality and Elaborate Courtesy Expressions

Among the features noted by the instructor during classroom marking were elaborate courtesy expressions and forms of address that appeared unusually formal for a personal invitation between friends.

The concern was not politeness itself, which is appropriate in Arabic invitations, but the degree of formality and elaboration. In a beginner-level task involving friends, excessively deferential expressions may obscure the simplicity of the intended message and create a mismatch between the communicative situation and the selected register.

4.3. Lexical Overreach and Unnecessary Structural Complexity

The instructor also identified vocabulary and sentence formulations considered beyond the students' expected instructional level. These choices suggested a tendency toward elevated expression where familiar words and shorter constructions would have been sufficient.

Lexical sophistication and syntactic complexity were not treated as weaknesses in themselves. Their significance arose from their limited necessity for completing the task and their apparent distance from the learners' established classroom proficiency. The central issue was therefore the suitability of the linguistic choices rather than the presence of advanced forms alone.

4.4. Differences Between Task Completion and Learner-Appropriate Expression

The available invitation texts illustrate that students could present recognizable invitation messages while also including additional expressions or details. However, elaboration in the directly examined texts was not uniformly evidence of advanced vocabulary or excessive formality. This distinction is important: additional content, stylistic ornamentation, and linguistic overreach should not be treated as interchangeable phenomena.

The broader instructor observations nevertheless identify a pedagogically significant tension between producing an acceptable invitation and producing one that reflects the language expected of a beginner learner.

4.5. Limits of Interpretation

The findings are based primarily on the instructor's professional observations during the review of classroom submissions, supplemented by three available handwritten invitation texts. The broader submissions were not systematically coded for this study, and the available texts are not treated as statistically representative. The instructor's judgments of linguistic over-elaboration draw on knowledge of the learners' instructional level and the communicative requirements of the task. These judgments identify a pedagogical concern but do not establish the frequency of individual features or the independent writing proficiency of particular students. Since individual interactions with generative AI or translation tools were not documented, the study does not attribute specific expressions to a particular tool or claim that digital assistance caused the observed stylistic features.

5. Discussion

5.1. Linguistic Sophistication and Learner-Level Appropriateness

The central concern emerging from the instructor's observations is the apparent mismatch between the linguistic sophistication of some submitted invitations and the proficiency expected of beginner Arabic learners. This distinction is pedagogically important because the quality of a written product cannot be evaluated solely through grammatical accuracy or the presence of advanced vocabulary. Language must also

be appropriate to the writer's communicative purpose, intended audience, and instructional level.

Biber and Conrad^[1] provide a useful perspective on register variation, while Taguchi^[4] emphasizes the importance of pragmatic appropriateness in second-language instruction. Applied to the present context, these perspectives suggest that elaborate honorifics, elevated vocabulary, and unnecessarily complex constructions may be less suitable than straightforward expressions in a personal invitation between friends. The issue is not whether sophisticated Arabic is inherently undesirable, but whether its use serves the communicative requirements of a beginner-level task.

Connor's^[15] discussion of intercultural rhetoric further supports attention to the relationship between linguistic choices, communicative expectations, and the contexts in which texts are produced.

5.2. AI-Permitted Writing and the Interpretation of Performance

The permission to use generative AI and electronic translation introduces an additional challenge when interpreting submitted writing. Learners may have access to linguistic formulations that exceed their independently demonstrated abilities. However, the present study cannot establish whether specific expressions originated from AI, translation tools, or students' own choices.

Research on AI-assisted writing highlights the importance of evaluating and selecting externally generated suggestions^[5, 6]. These studies support a pedagogical concern about critical engagement with digital assistance, although they do not demonstrate that such assistance caused the over-elaboration observed in this classroom.

Essa^[12] proposed a stage-gated framework in which beginner Arabic learners retain responsibility for evaluating linguistic suggestions and selecting final wording. The present observations illustrate why attention to lexical suitability, register, and learner voice may be valuable within that proposed approach. They do not, however, constitute an empirical test of the framework.

5.3. Implications for Writing Assessment

A further implication concerns the interpretation of learner performance. Essa^[13] distinguished AI-supported task performance from independent learning outcomes. Accordingly, a sophisticated submitted invitation should not automatically be treated as evidence that a beginner learner can independently produce comparable language.

Assessment of AI-permitted functional writing may therefore benefit from considering three related dimensions: whether the text communicates its intended message, whether its linguistic choices suit the audience and situation, and whether its complexity is appropriate to the instructional expectations. These dimensions are proposed assessment considerations rather than a validated instrument.

The study's contribution lies in identifying a classroom-based concern that conventional attention to grammatical correctness may overlook. Nevertheless, its qualitative and teacher-informed evidence does not support causal claims about AI use, estimates of prevalence, or conclusions about individual learners' independent writing ability.

6. Conclusion

This study examined linguistic and stylistic over-elaboration in beginner Arabic writing through instructor observations and selected invitation texts produced in a classroom task permitting generative AI and

electronic translation. The central concern was the apparent mismatch between the sophistication of some submitted expressions, the learners' expected proficiency, and the communicative simplicity of a personal invitation.

The study highlights an important distinction between linguistic correctness and learner-level appropriateness. Advanced vocabulary, elaborate courtesy expressions, and complex sentence structures are not inherently problematic. However, their use may become pedagogically questionable when they are unnecessary for the communicative purpose or disproportionate to the learner's instructional level. Consequently, the apparent quality of a submitted text should not be equated automatically with the learner's independent writing ability.

The findings suggest that assessment of beginner Arabic writing in digitally supported environments should consider not only grammatical accuracy and task completion but also lexical suitability, register, and the relationship between textual complexity and instructional expectations. Such considerations may help teachers identify writing that is formally acceptable yet insufficiently aligned with the intended learning objectives.

These conclusions remain exploratory and grounded primarily in the instructor's classroom observations, supplemented by a limited set of writing samples. The study does not establish the origins of individual expressions or demonstrate a causal effect of generative AI. Its contribution is to foreground learner-appropriate expression as a necessary consideration in evaluating beginner Arabic writing when digital assistance is permitted.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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