

Interpersonal meaning in AI-human conversations: An SFL analysis of casual VS. academic interactions in ChatGPT responses

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of conversational artificial intelligence in casual and academic communication raises significant questions about how such systems create interpersonal meaning through language. Limited research has been conducted in terms of linguistic mechanisms through which interpersonal relationships are established across different registers. Addressing this gap, the current study explores how ChatGPT creates interpersonal meaning in informal and formal academic interactions through the lens of the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) framework. This qualitative SFL-based analysis research examines 10 ChatGPT-generated responses to prompts that were purposely designed, comprising five casual and five academic interactions that were broken down into 86 clauses and analyzed through the lens of the interpersonal metafunction, focusing on mood, modality, and appraisal, facilitated by register theory and the three dimensions of human-machine communication (HMC). The findings reveal a clear variation in the use of ChatGPT's interpersonal strategies depending on the register. Casual interactions exhibit a higher number of appraisal resources, especially affect and engagement, which reflect a relational and user-oriented stance. In contrast, academic interactions are described by the predominance of declarative mood and medium to high. This study provides insight into how AI imitates human behavior, such as interactional roles through language selection. The findings highlight the importance of register sensitivity in AI-human communication and have implications for linguistics, language education, and chatbot design. It is suggested that further studies should consider investigating larger datasets, more registers, and comparative analyses of different AI models.

Keywords: ChatGPT; human-machine communication; interpersonal meaning; register theory; systemic functional linguistics

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INTRODUCTION

The fast progress of artificial intelligence (AI) has greatly changed how people communicate. While ChatGPT utilizes large language models to produce contextually relevant responses (Brown et al., 2020), its capacity to negotiate complex social semiotic functions remains a critical area of investigation. Previous research has highlighted AI's linguistic fluency (Hancock et al., 2020), yet there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding how ChatGPT adapts its tenor and mood choices when navigating the informal-formal continuum. This study addresses this gap by employing a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) framework to analyze how interpersonal meanings are systematically varied in AI-generated responses across casual and academic settings (Brown et al., 2020; Hancock et al., 2020; Jurafsky & Martin, 2023). This focus on the interpersonal dimension is crucial, as it shifts the analytical lens from the machine's computational output to the social semiotic quality of the human-AI exchange.

The rise of big language models like ChatGPT must be seen within wider discussions about what generative AI can and cannot do. Floridi and Chiriatti (2020) mention that models such as GPT-3 work through advanced pattern recognition rather than true understanding, producing outputs that seem linguistically coherent but lack intentionality or consciousness. These limitations exist, yet these systems still create discussions which seem socially and contextually aware and mimic human interaction well. To rigorously examine these interactional dynamics, it is essential to situate the analysis within the broader field of linguistics, which provides the analytical tools to dissect how language functions in social contexts. Consequently, exploring the specific linguistic mechanisms that facilitate such stimulation is key. SFL offers a robust framework for analyzing how interpersonal meaning is shared, providing a systematic approach to investigating how AI-generated discourse establishes social rapport across diverse communicative settings.

Recent studies have examined ChatGPT's adaptability, responsiveness, and communicative effectiveness across different domains. Studies in education and human-computer interaction have found that users tend to treat chatbots as socially present agents that can simulate engagement, politeness, and relational alignment (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Clarke & Graesser, 2021; Kasneci et al., 2023). A few papers have also focused on the stylistic flexibility and tone of the AI-generated text, emphasizing the model's capability to change from casual to academic language depending on the user's prompt. Nevertheless, this body of literature is still largely descriptive or evaluative, as it concentrates on usability, ethical concerns, or superficial stylistic features. Consequently, these studies often fail to provide a systematic linguistic account of the interpersonal aspects of AI discourse.

Conversational AI systems are being recognized as agents that can socially and communicatively interact with humans rather than mere tools. Sundar (2020) explains this idea with the concept of machine agency when he says that users give AI the attributes of intention, ability, and even as a member of society when it shows very close context, sensitive linguistic behavior. Going further in that direction, Andersson and McIntyre (2025) provide experimental evidence that large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT are on the path to acquiring pragmatic awareness, which includes becoming polite and following interactional norms. These papers have shown that AI has social and pragmatic abilities but have not adequately addressed the point of how such agency and pragmatic awareness are the linguistic side of the interaction. The difference here points to the requirement of a systematic, concerted, and theory-driven investigation of the interpersonal meanings in the dialogues produced by AI in different registers.

From a linguistic point of view, SFL offers an elaborate framework to look at language as a means of making meaning in different social contexts. According to SFL, interpersonal meaning deals with the ways in which speakers or writers, through their linguistic choices, represent social roles, change relationships, and show their attitudes. These linguistic choices include mood, modality, and appraisal (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & White, 2005; Eggins, 2004). The AI-human interaction is a case where this metafunction is most relevant, as the success of communication depends largely on whether the language of the AI is seen as being appropriate, interesting, and sensitive to the context. The language produced by AI systems, although they are without

consciousness or a communicative intent, has to imitate interpersonal alignment if it is to serve interaction effectively (Hancock et al., 2020; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

Moreover, register theory from SFL is one of the most helpful concepts that explains the change of language according to the situational context by the three dimensions: field, tenor, and mode (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Eggins, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2003). In AI-mediated communication, the role tenors are the most important, as they show the relational positioning between users and the chatbot. In general, casual interactions are characterized by an informal tone, interpersonal closeness, and a lowered degree of authority, whereas academic interactions require formality, exactness, and an authoritative stance. Although the study of the past acknowledges that ChatGPT is capable of functioning in different registers, research is still in its infancy as far as understanding how the model linguistically constructs interpersonal meaning to be able to meet these contrasting interactional demands is concerned. Besides, very little effort has been made towards combining linguistic analysis with information from human-machine communication (HMC), which sees AI not just as a tool, but as a communicative partner that changes user perceptions and interactional experiences (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

The current research is a novel contribution to the field, which systematically compares how ChatGPT constructs casual and academic interpersonal meanings in interactions using SFL as the main framework and register theory and the three dimensions of HMC (functional, relational, and metaphysical) as supportive theories. By concentrating on mood, modality, and appraisal systems only, the present research goes beyond the mere stylistic changes at the surface level and uncovers the ways the AI-generated language negotiates stance, authority, and relational alignment across different registers. Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to investigate how ChatGPT builds interpersonal meaning in casual and academic interactions by addressing the following objectives:

1. to identify the linguistic features employed by ChatGPT to realize interpersonal meaning in each register
2. to analyze how mood, modality, and appraisal vary across registers through register theory
3. to examine the significance of these interpersonal strategies within the framework of human-machine communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AI-mediated communication and ChatGPT

The growing use of artificial intelligence in usual communication has, in turn, attracted the attention of researchers to AI, mediated discourse, mostly to the interactions with conversational agents like ChatGPT. AI-mediated communication denotes communicative practices where AI systems produce, mediate, or influence linguistic exchanges between humans and machines (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Hancock et al., 2020; Luger & Sellen, 2016). As opposed to former rules, based systems, present-day large language models can generate long, contextually appropriate, and human, like interactional patterns. Because of this advancement, researchers have been inspired to look into the sociolinguistic aspects of the language generated by AI, besides the technical aspects of the performance of the chatbots.

ChatGPT has been singled out among AI studies as a major factor contributing to the wide range of communication strategies it can handle, i.e., informal conversation, academic explanation, professional advising, and emotional support (Kasneci et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that users frequently characterize ChatGPT as a flexible and socially engaging agent, whereby they assign it human, like features such as politeness, empathy, and authority in its answers (Nass & Moon, 2000). Nevertheless, most of the research conducted in this area is still predominantly concentrated on how users perceive it, the ethical issues involved, and its value as a teaching tool, with very few studies addressing the linguistic resources by which such interpersonal impressions are achieved.

Interpersonal meaning in systemic functional linguistics

SFL is a comprehensive model from a linguistic perspective that shows how meaning is created and negotiated in interaction. According to SFL, language is a social semiotic system that can simultaneously realize three metafunctions: ideational, textual, and interpersonal (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The interpersonal metafunction is, in fact, most closely related to AI, human communication, as it is about how language enacts social relations, negotiates roles, and expresses attitudes. In the case of AI, generated discourse, interpersonal meaning is of utmost importance in figuring out the chatbot's stance, credibility, and engagement.

Interpersonal meaning in SFL is essentially achieved through three major linguistic systems: mood, modality, and appraisal. Mood structures, such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses, regulate the interactional roles of speakers and listeners by indicating the encoding of statements, questions, or commands (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Modality communicates degrees of certainty, obligation, or inclination, thus enabling speakers to indicate their position with respect to propositions and interlocutors (Eggins, 2004). Appraisal, the conception of Martin and White (2005), reflects the use of evaluative language by the three main interrelated systems of attitude, engagement, and graduation. Thus, it shows how speakers communicate their emotions, make judgments, and express their values.

Register theory and contextual variation

The importance of interpersonal meaning is even more evident when the contextual variation of language use is taken into account. Within SFL, register theory clarifies how linguistic choices are influenced by the situational context through the variables of the field, the tenor, and the mode (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Eggins, 2004). Tenor, which deals with the social relations between participants, is a very important aspect in AI, human interaction, as it reflects the relationship which is felt between users and the chatbot.

Casual conversations usually use informal language, show that the people are close to each other, and have less of a show of authority, while academic conversations need to be formal, exact, and from a position of authority (Martin & Rose, 2003). Studying the changes of ChatGPT in the use of its interpersonal resources from one different style of speech to another provides us with a clue about its ability to communicate in a way that is appropriate to the situation and also demonstrates how important it is for an AI to be aware of the different registers when producing a text.

Human-machine communication (HMC)

Along with linguistic methods, HMC offers an interdisciplinary conception of AI systems as social agents capable of communication rather than just as instruments. According to HMC studies, the users are, in most cases, psychologically inclined to treat machines as social beings and hence attribute qualities of agency, personality, and relationship to AI-driven systems (Guzman & Lewis, 2020; Nass & Moon, 2000). Hence, this viewpoint underscores the significance of investigating the communication of AI not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its style, especially with respect to the relational and emotional impact that it may have. By integrating HMC with SFL, researchers can better understand how linguistic choices in AI-generated language shape user experience, trust, and engagement.

The increasing sophistication of large language models further strengthens the relevance of this perspective. For example, GPT-4 has demonstrated advanced linguistic capabilities in performing discourse-related analytical tasks, suggesting an enhanced ability to produce contextually appropriate and structured communication (Yu et al., 2024). Similarly, ChatGPT has been recognized for its transformative role across research domains, while scholars also emphasize the importance of critically examining its communicative implications and epistemological limitations (Zhu et al., 2023). These developments reinforce the importance of studying AI not only as a computational system but also as a communicative actor whose language choices shape human interpretation and interaction.

The research gap

Taken together, the reviewed literature indicates a clear gap in research addressing how ChatGPT constructs interpersonal meaning through specific linguistic resources across contrasting registers. Acknowledging ChatGPT's adaptability and social responsiveness, previous studies rarely conceptualize SFL, register theory, and HMC as tools to locate and analyze interpersonal meaning in AI, generated discourse. To bridge that gap, this investigation employs an SFL-based qualitative method to the study of mood, modality, and appraisal in ChatGPT answers in casual and academic interactions. This research, by providing a comparative and theory-driven analysis, makes a valuable contribution to linguistic research of AI discourse and, furthermore, facilitates the understanding of the operation of interpersonal meaning in machine-generated communication.

METHOD

A qualitative interpretative approach is particularly suitable for this study as it facilitates a rigorous examination of textual data as a social semiotic practice (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Sandelowski, 2000). This research employs a qualitative interpretive design to investigate how ChatGPT constructs interpersonal meaning within human-AI interactions across varying speech styles. By moving beyond a purely descriptive framework, this study adopts an analytical approach rooted in SFL to examine the nuance of language used by ChatGPT in both casual and academic registers. Unlike traditional descriptive methods, this design allows for a deeper interpretation of how linguistic choices function as social tools in AI discourse, providing a systematic account of the interactional dynamics rather than mere surface-level phenomena that characterize AI-generated text. This enables a detailed analysis of AI language as a strategic construction of meaning rather than as static or experimental data.

Research context and data source

The research context of this study is communication that is mediated by AI. ChatGPT is the place where the interaction took place. The data source is the texts of the answers that were generated by ChatGPT, 4 in response to the prompts designed by the researchers and representing two different interactional contexts: casual and academic. In this study, the 'casual' context is operationalized as informal, spontaneous-like exchanges characterized by a close social distance, minimal technicality, and the use of colloquialisms or affective language. Conversely, the 'academic' context is defined by a greater social distance and a higher degree of formality, characterized by using specialized terminology, complex grammatical structures (such as nominalization), and an objective, authoritative tenor. ChatGPT, a large language model developed by OpenAI, was chosen because it is a very popular tool, and a great number of users have verified that it can operate in different communicative registers with ease.

The data came into existence via purposive sampling, more specifically, constructed text sampling, as the study is about intentionally elicited responses only and not naturally occurring conversations. This sampling method is a standard one in qualitative linguistic research, which aims to make sure that the collected data are relevant to the research objectives and sufficiently rich for analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2023). The prompts, according to register theory, were aimed at reflecting the different contextual configurations of field, tenor, and mode (Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

Research instruments and materials

In a qualitative study, the researcher is considered the main research instrument who oversees creating the research design, collecting data, coding linguistic features, and interpreting the results (Creswell & Poth, 2023). To facilitate this, the study used ChatGPT and generated transcripts as the primary source of data. The instruments of this study were: (1) the researcher being the main instrument for data collection and analysis, and (2) ChatGPT-generated textual responses as the linguistic corpus for the SFL framework. The prompts were used as an elicitation instrument to ensure consistency and comparability of the casual and academic interactional contexts.

Data collection and analysis procedures

Data gathering was realized through direct prompts, based elicitation, and recording. The total number of prompts created was ten, including five casual prompts and five academic ones. The casual prompts aimed at getting informal, friendly, and conversational responses, whereas the academic prompts were intended to produce formal, instructional, or knowledge-oriented responses. Under controlled conditions to reduce variation unrelated to register differences, each prompt was fed into ChatGPT-4. The resulting texts were copied verbatim, documented, and classified by interaction type. Documentation served to systematically hold and arrange the data in text format, thus allowing detailed linguistic inspection and traceability during the whole analysis stage (Sugiyono, 2015).

The analysis of the data followed a modified version of Creswell and Poth's (2023) qualitative data analysis framework, which was adjusted for discourse and register analysis. The procedures took place in several stages. Initially, all the answers were sorted and prepared for analysis by categorizing them into casual and academic types. Next, the researcher went through the data several times to get a general understanding of the linguistic realization of interpersonal meaning.

After that, the researchers coded the data according to interpersonal systems of SFL, which included mood types (declarative, interrogative, imperative), modality (high, medium, and low degrees of certainty or obligation), and appraisal resources (attitude, engagement, and graduation) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & White, 2005). Besides, the coded linguistic features were grouped and explained through register theory, concentrating on how the interpersonal meaning changes from casual to academic contexts depending on the tenor.

At the last stage, the results were explained with the help of three dimensions of HMC, such as functional, relational, and metaphysical, to illustrate the way in which ChatGPT's linguistic choices lead to user engagement, perceived social presence, and contextual appropriateness in AI-human interaction (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the study on the use of ChatGPT to create interpersonal meaning in casual and academic interactions. The results are based on a qualitative linguistic analysis of ChatGPT-generated responses and are arranged to correspond with the research questions stated in the introduction. This section is not about the procedures, but rather summarizes the main patterns and tendencies that have been revealed through the data analysis. The results are displayed by means of descriptive narration and tabulated data, which makes it possible to have a brief but clear view of the prevailing linguistic patterns without the need for an elaborate description.

In order to perform a detailed analysis, the utterances were broken down into clauses since the clause is the main unit of interpersonal meaning in SFL. The number of responses and clauses in the two registers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Responses and Clauses Distribution

Registers	Responses	Clauses
Casual	5	46
Academic	5	33

Linguistic features of interpersonal meaning in casual and academic interactions

This section details the linguistic features that ChatGPT utilizes to build the interpersonal meaning in casual and academic. A glance at SFL reveals that the analysis concentrates on three systems of the interpersonal: mood, modality, and appraisal. These linguistic features are investigated to figure out how ChatGPT places itself, plays the interactional roles, and shows its stance in communication with different communicative contexts.

The results reveal that the use of declarative mood structures is a common feature of both casual and academic conversations, which is reflected in the majority of their utterances. Nevertheless, the interpersonal functions of these utterances vary from one register to another. Casual responses are

very likely to be decorated with interpersonal markers such as personal pronouns, inclusive expressions, and affective language, whereas academic responses are more focused on informational clarity and neutrality. The subsequent chart illustrates the occurrence of the different mood types, modality values, and appraisal resources in the two registers.

Figure 1

Mood Analysis: Declarative, Imperative, Interrogative

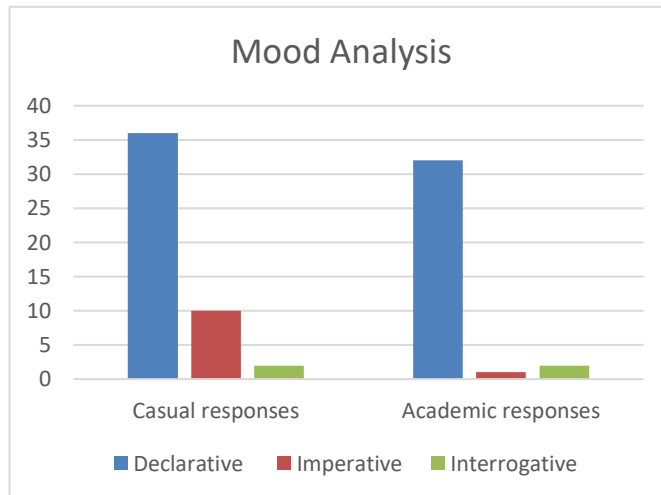


Figure 1 features the amount of different mood types, i.e., declarative, imperative, and interrogative, that were used in ChatGPT's casual and academic responses. As per the chart, declarative clauses are the most frequent in both interactional contexts, which means that ChatGPT generally creates interpersonal meaning by giving information to the user through statements in any register. The prevalence of declarative clauses reflects the chatbot's primary communicative function as an information provider.

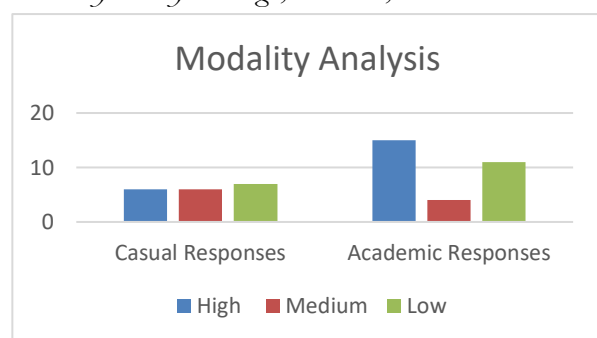
In academic responses, declarative clauses are used most of all, and there is also a considerable number of imperative clauses. The appearance of imperatives in casual responses indicates that the interpersonal tone is more interactive and supportive, i.e., ChatGPT frequently offers suggestions, encouragement, or guidance (e.g., 'Try doing it this way or Let me explain). Interrogative clauses are only a few, which shows that ChatGPT seldom asks questions and instead directly answers user prompts.

On the other hand, academic interactions are dominated by a strong dependence on declarative clauses with a very small number of imperative and interrogative forms. The pattern here is that academic discourse is formal and focused on the information, and hence ChatGPT takes the role of the authoritative and explanatory one. The fewer imperatives indicate that the discourse is more detached, thus objectivity and knowledge sharing are emphasized instead of interpersonal engagement.

In general, the results here show that the declarative mood serves as the main linguistic resource for expressing interpersonal meaning in both registers. Casual interactions, however, permit a wider variation of moods, thus supporting a more relational and user, oriented communicative style. Such a difference is a reflection of ChatGPT's ability to switch its interpersonal strategies depending on the requirements of the context.

Figure 2

Modality Analysis: High, Medium, Low



The modality analysis shows distinct differences in how ChatGPT conveys certainty, obligation, and possibility across two registers: one is casual, the other academic. As the graph indicates, academic answers are largely made up of high modality expressions, whereas casual answers show a more even distribution of high, medium, and low modality.

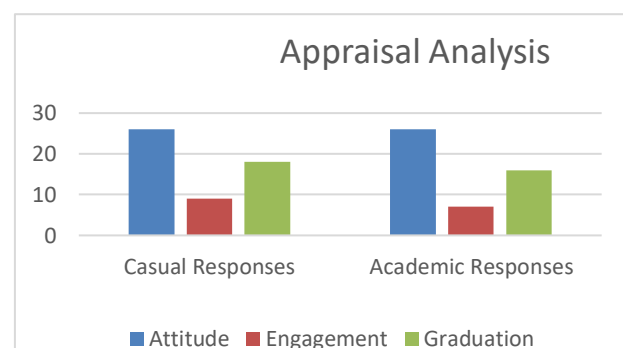
High modality is the most frequent in academic interactions, thus indicating the strongest expression of certainty and authority. This fact implies that ChatGPT changes its interpersonal stance to a more assertive one when it answers academically oriented prompts, thereby becoming a source of information that is knowledgeable and reliable. The use of high modality is in line with the formal tenor of academic discourse, where it is expected that one be precise and confident. Medium modality is less frequent, and low modality is still there, but it is subordinate, thus giving examples of cautious qualification in some explanations.

By comparison, casual interactions reveal a balanced distribution of modality levels. The presence of low and medium modality in casual replies is indicative of a more tentative and flexible stance whereby ChatGPT is able to raise suggestions, possibilities, and shared understanding instead of making firm assertions. Such a pattern serves to establish a more conversational and user-friendly interpersonal relationship, which is in harmony with the informal and relational nature of casual discourse.

Overall, these results indicate that ChatGPT makes strategic decisions concerning its modality use depending on the communicative context. It uses high modality to assert authority and expertise in academic contexts, whereas varied modality in casual interactions facilitates interpersonal closeness and interactional openness. Such a change puts forward modality as the main resource for the construction of context and appropriate interpersonal meaning.

Figure 3

Appraisal Analysis: Attitude, Engagement, Graduation



The appraisal analysis reveals the manner in which ChatGPT uses evaluative language to establish interpersonal meaning in both casual and academic conversations. As per the chart, attitude resources are the main ones in both registers, which means that ChatGPT very often, in its answers,

encodes evaluations, emotions, and judgments. This finding implies that appraisal is the main way in which the chatbot simulates interpersonal engagement across different communicative contexts.

In casual responses, attitude resources are the most conspicuous ones, and they are frequently brought about by positive affect and supportive expressions. The pattern shows that ChatGPT tends to produce a friendly and encouraging interpersonal stance, which helps to establish relational closeness with the user. Moreover, the graduation resources are more heavily weighted in casual responses; thus, the chatbot can intensify or soften the meanings (for example, "very helpful", "a bit tricky"). In this way, the conversational naturalness and expressiveness are enhanced. Also, there are some engagement resources which reveal that the chatbot is open to different viewpoints and dialogic expansion.

In academic responses, attitude resources are still the main ones, but they are realized in a more restrained and neutral manner, most of the time being associated with appreciation rather than affect. There are still some instances of graduation resources, although slightly less than in casual interactions, they are used to indicate the degree of the claims and to keep academic caution. There are hardly any references to engagement resources, thus reflecting a more monoglossic stance where ChatGPT chooses to be an authoritative explainer rather than a dialogic negotiator.

The appraisal patterns on the whole indicate that ChatGPT is always evaluative and uses evaluative language for interpersonal meaning management. However, there are more evaluative possibilities and more expressiveness allowed in casual interactions, whereas academic interactions are characterized by controlled and institutionally appropriate evaluation. The difference in question emphasizes ChatGPT's ability to modify its interpersonal stance via appraisal options in line with the expectations of the register.

Comparison of casual and academic registers based on register theory

This subsection contrasts ChatGPT's establishment of interpersonal meaning in casual and academic interactions from the perspective of register theory, which understands language variation as a function of the situational variables of field, tenor, and mode (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Although both types of interactions imply an exchange of information between users and the AI system, the findings show that there are systematic differences in the interpersonal orientation that mirror the contrasting contextual demands.

Regarding the field, the comparison between the two kinds of interaction, i.e., casual and academic, indicates that the former are oriented toward everyday communication and informal assistance, whereas the latter are knowledge-driven and task-oriented, thus making the activities quite different in each case. The former, being more or less the continuation of the user's everyday life, also allows for greater flexibility in language use. On the other hand, the latter, due to their nature, mainly focus on the issues of explanation, clarification, and accuracy. This difference in the field has an impact on how the interpersonal meaning is realized linguistically, particularly in terms of modality and appraisal choices.

The tenor dimension shows the biggest difference between the two registers. In casual register, the tenor is described as the users being socially and hierarchically equal and close to ChatGPT. This is seen linguistically in the predominance of the low and medium modality, supportive imperative clauses, and affective appraisal resources, which, when combined, create a friendly and cooperative interpersonal stance. ChatGPT thus not only claims to be easy to communicate with conversational partners but explicitly disavows the status of an authoritative expert.

In academic register, the tenor becomes more characteristic of an unequal relationship in which ChatGPT is the expert or the teacher. This role is linguistically represented by the main use of declarative clauses, high modality expressions, and subdued evaluative language. Also, the decreased use of engagement features points to a more formal and detached interpersonal stance, which is in line with the institutional norms of academic discourse.

Regarding mode, both interactions of different kinds were achieved through digitally mediated written communication; nevertheless, the differences in the degree of interactivity become apparent.

Casual responses contain features typical of spoken, like written discourse, such as conversational tone, interpersonal markers, and modality. Academic responses, however, reveal features of a planned and monologue written discourse, as they emphasize clarity, coherence, and informational density rather than interactional engagement.

Overall, the register-based comparison demonstrates that ChatGPT systematically adapts its interpersonal language choices in response to contextual variables. Casual interactions favor relational closeness and interactional flexibility, while academic interactions prioritize authority, precision, and institutional appropriateness. These findings confirm that register theory provides an effective framework for explaining how interpersonal meaning varies across AI–human communication contexts.

Interpretation of findings based on the three dimensions of human-machine communication

This part of the paper aligns the results with a theoretical framework of HMC. The three dimensions of HMC, functional, relational, and metaphysical, were used to interpret the findings of the study (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). By pulling in elements of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Register Theory, this paper goes beyond just describing the language to show how ChatGPT's language can influence the user's mood and their perception of AI-mediated communication.

The findings show that from the functional perspective, ChatGPT strategically adapts its language to achieve task-oriented goals in different registers. The chatbot's frequent usage of declarative mood, high modality, and especially controlled evaluative language in academic interactions allows it to perform teaching and information, giving an instructional function effectively. These linguistic features serve the purpose of academic communication by making it more accurate, clear, and giving the chatbot scientific authority.

On the other hand, casual interactions reveal more variations in mood types and modality levels than in the use of any specific language function, thus enabling ChatGPT to act as a conversational assistant who can provide help, make suggestions, and offer everyday explanations. Such functional flexibility of the AI is in line with prior HMC studies, which indicate that efficient AI systems are those that can change their communication strategies according to the situation.

The relational dimension underscores the role of ChatGPT's linguistic choices in building social relationships with users. In informal interactions, the frequent employment of affective appraisal, low and medium modality, and supportive imperatives, among others, serves to establish interpersonal closeness and involvement. The use of these elements depicts ChatGPT as an entity that is easy to approach and willing to cooperate; thus, a feeling of social presence is being reinforced. On the other hand, academic interactions depict a distant interpersonal stance, which is therefore less relational intimacy, but more credibility and professionalism are perceived. The present study's findings are in line with previous investigations that have recognized the context and appropriate relational behavior of chatbots as a positive factor for users.

The metaphysical dimension is about how ChatGPT's language shapes the users' more general view of AI as a communicative entity. The data reveal that one of the reasons why ChatGPT is considered a socially competent and context-aware agent is its ability to transfer the interpersonal strategies from one register to another. ChatGPT, by humanizing machines, like linguistic behavior, puts into question the long-standing view of machines as devoid of any social function and thus only tools. The evidence shows that instead of being fully human or entirely mechanical, ChatGPT takes a middle communicative position. This is in line with the HMC theories that locate the changing ontological status of AI in human communication as one of the key issues.

In sum, these interpretations show that AI, generated language, in terms of interpersonal meaning, is not just a side effect but a systematic construction to sustain functional effectiveness, relational engagement, and changing perceptions of machine agency. This research moves forward the current HMC studies by specifying a linguistic basis for the AI system's management of interpersonal moods by revealing how mood, modality, and appraisal interact with different registers. The

combination of SFL, register theory, and HMC here provides a new way to study the interaction between AI and humans and points out that language is still the main tool for digital communication.

DISCUSSION

This research explored how ChatGPT uses mood, modality, and appraisal to create a casual and academic interpersonal meaning. The study utilized SFL as the primary framework, along with register theory and HMC. The findings reveal that ChatGPT consistently modifies its interpersonal strategies based on the communicative context, which is a direct answer to the research objectives stated in the introduction. Instead of generating identical answers, ChatGPT exhibits register, sensitive linguistic behavior, which shows its ability to simulate socially appropriate interaction in context.

The findings serve to extend the current body of research concerned with language produced by AI, which has mainly been debated in terms of ethics, functions, and technology (Bender et al., 2021; Weidinger et al., 2022). These studies examine issues like bias, misinformation, and societal impact; however, they barely indicate the linguistic mechanisms through which AI assigns meaning in the interaction. This paper emphasizes the importance of interpersonal meaning as a point of departure for the analysis that focuses on the manner of linguistically enacting relationships, authority, and stance by AI rather than the content of AI's speech, thus filling the most considerable gap in the field of AI discourse studies.

Regarding style adaptability, the results represent the confirmed ones from the works of research, as they show that ChatGPT changes its tone and style depending on the different inputs or instructions given (Hwang et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these authors, in their studies, unlike the present research, whose findings are substantiated by a theoretical framework, suggest that the changes are observable only at the level of superficial features of style, such as the use of different words and variation of sentence structure. Register variation, according to the analysis, is a social linguistic phenomenon which is reflected in the changes of mood types, modality values, and appraisal resources, thus providing a much fuller account of how interpersonal meaning is negotiated across contexts.

From the point of view of SFL, the results correspond to those of previous studies on interpersonal aspects of human discourse, which identify mood and modality as the main linguistic means for expressing social relations (Sofyan & Wulan, 2021; Rezeki et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the current study moves their understanding of the issue further by not only literary and political texts but also AI-generated conversational discourse. The occurrence of standard interpersonal patterns in the answers of ChatGPT is indicative that language produced by a machine can be, on an operational level, one of the interpersonal metafunctions, which is similar to human communicative practices.

Register theory offers a prominent explanatory perspective for understanding these results. Changes in mood, modality, and appraisal correspond to changes in field, tenor, and mode, characterizing the differences between casual and academic interactions. Casual responses generally operate in a more equal and engaging tenor, whereas academic responses use the construction of authority and objectivity through the reduction of modality and evaluative control. These findings corroborate and extend previous research indicating that ChatGPT can adapt linguistic style according to communicative instructions and contextual demands (Liu & Demberg, 2023). In particular, ChatGPT can modify textual output through controllable sentence style transfer, suggesting that effective AI communication depends not only on functional responsiveness but also on the linguistic realization of register alignment across contexts.

The findings, when viewed through the lens of HMC, are consistent with the view that users are increasingly attributing conversational AI the social role of a human interlocutor (Nass & Moon, 2000; Guzman & Lewis, 2020). ChatGPT's capability of changing the interpersonal meaning across different registers increases its credibility, politeness, and relational appropriateness. This means that linguistic features like mood, modality, and appraisal might be instrumental in determining user experience and setting user expectations in AI-mediated communication.

The current results also point in the same direction as the research concerning AIs' emerging pragmatic awareness and perceived agency in interaction. According to [Sundar \(2020\)](#), the framework of machine agency, when an AI system exhibits context-sensitive linguistic behavior, users may attribute social and communicative competence to that system. This is supported by the present study's finding that ChatGPT is not just a random but a very systematic agent in interpersonal meaning changes when it moves from casual to academic registers by changing mood, modality, and appraisal.

Besides, [Andersson and McIntyre \(2025\)](#) argue that ChatGPT's capability to detect and react to impoliteness points to its gradual sensitivity to pragmatic norms rather than just being a set of language patterns on the surface. As a result, these data together indicate that the interpersonal strategies of ChatGPT are not a mere coincidence but signal the emergence of a new kind of pragmatic alignment with human expectations. The capacity to change politeness, authority, and relational stance depending on the situation, in the view of users, is what makes ChatGPT a socially competent agent. This, in turn, reveals the central role of interpersonal meaning in the establishment of effective and socially appropriate communication between humans and AI, the latter being the most socially correct form of communication.

The research, in general, is an interdisciplinary work which opens new avenues of interaction through the combined application of SFL, register theory, and HMC for the analysis of interpersonal meaning in AI, generated discourse. The paper moves beyond current AI research by providing a language-based explanation of how ChatGPT imitates human interaction in different contexts (both casual and academic) and, at the same time, it ushers in functional linguistic approaches as a powerful tool for revealing the social aspects of human-AI communication.

CONCLUSION

This research was focused on understanding the way ChatGPT creates social interaction in casual and academic conversations by looking at mood, modality, and appraisal within the concepts of SFL, register theory, and HMC. The results show that ChatGPT alters its social strategies in a very systematic way depending on the communication context, thus demonstrating its capacity to simulate social context, sensitive interaction, rather than simply producing linguistically uniform responses. By uncovering register-based changes in interpersonal meaning, this research helps to grasp AI, generate discourse more profoundly, and opens the field further beyond the work which has primarily been concerned with the ethical, technical, or surface-level stylistic aspects of AI language. The integration of SFL and register theory provides a linguistically grounded account of the way AI socially enacts roles, negotiates authority, and conforms to user expectations, whereas the HMC viewpoint elucidates the consequences of these linguistic choices for the human perception of AI as social actors. This research has made some contributions, but it has been constrained by a small dataset and a focus on two interactional registers, which might not have captured the complete range of the AI's communicative behavior. Hence, a new study is advised to use larger corpora, add more registers or languages, and combine qualitative analysis with quantitative or experimental methods to investigate more deeply the interpersonal meaning of the humanAI interaction. The results represent a resource to teachers, AI developers, and users, among whom linguistic sensitivity to context in the design and evaluation of conversational AI being of prime importance is acknowledged by educators, developers, and users. Theoretically, this research serves to corroborate the application of functional linguistics as a vehicle to deepen interdisciplinary studies on AI and mediated communication. The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who supported the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the thesis supervisor and academic advisors for their valuable guidance, constructive feedback, and scholarly insight throughout the research process. The author also acknowledges the support of colleagues and peers for their encouragement and intellectual discussions. Finally, appreciation is given to the developers of ChatGPT for providing access to the platform that served as the primary data source in this study.

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The authors certify that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this manuscript.

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