**Reading (15 marks)**

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| **Situation:**  You are Tony Chan, a research assistant at HKBU Language Centre. The Centre Head has asked you to prepare a talk on whether generative AI enhances or undermines the diversity of languages around the world. Read the article below and answer the following questions. |

**The Great Language Flattening**

[1] Last week, my mother, a retired English teacher who still corrects my grammar in text messages, sent me an email titled “Check this out!” Inside was a poem she claimed to have written for my birthday. Except it wasn’t hers. After reading the first stanza, with its peculiar blend of sentimentality and cautious metaphors, I knew immediately: Mom had discovered AI. “It’s just so much easier,” she admitted, “and honestly, it sounds better than what I would write.”

[2] And there it was—the moment I realized the Great Language Flattening had reached my own kitchen table.

**When Algorithms Become Ghostwriters**

[3] We’re witnessing a profound shift in human communication. Artificial intelligence isn’t just learning our language; it’s reshaping it in its own image. What starts as algorithms mimicking human expression is rapidly becoming humans mimicking algorithmic expression.

[4] Consider Marcus Wheeler, a marketing director who now routinely runs his emails through ChatGPT. “I’ve started doubting my own voice,” he explained. “The AI version always sounds more professional. I worry my natural writing seems too casual by comparison.”

[5] A 2024 Pew survey found that 47% of professional writers regularly use AI tools to “optimize” their writing. What begins as helpful editing subtly transforms into a homogenizing force. Linguistics professor Jameela Cordova notes: “These models output a peculiar middle-ground style—grammatically correct but often bloodless. It’s like linguistic fast food: immediately satisfying but nutritionally questionable.”

**The Goldilocks Zone of Blandness**

[6] AI language models weren’t programmed to produce bland writing. Instead, they evolved that way. Trained on vast datasets, they learned to find the statistical middle path through language, creating what researcher Timnit Gebru calls “the Goldilocks zone of blandness”, texts that are neither too formal nor too casual, as in the porridge in the Goldilocks fairy tale that that was “just right”.

[7] The problem arises when humans begin internalizing these patterns. Novelist Amara Reynolds now uses AI for first drafts. “I find myself writing ‘to’ the AI,” she told me. “I’m unconsciously writing in a way that the AI can more easily extend.” When asked if she worries about her distinctive voice disappearing, she paused. “Sometimes I read my new work and don’t recognize myself in it.”

[8] University professors report receiving papers with increasingly homogeneous style. “Ten years ago, I could identify my students by their writing quirks,” says Dr. Michael Zhang. “Now I receive thirty papers that read like they were written by the same person.”

**“I’m Not Talking to You; I’m Talking to Your Bot”**

[9] Perhaps more concerning is how this affects our human-to-human interactions. We’re beginning to write not for each other, but for the algorithms mediating our conversations.

[10] Emma Sullivan, a 23-year-old marketing assistant, describes editing her dating app messages to make them “more AI-friendly.” She explained: “I know guys might be using AI for responses, so I try to give clearer prompts. Fewer idioms, more direct questions.” She laughed, “Sometimes I’m not talking to the guy; I’m talking to his bot.”

[11] We’re losing linguistic diversity. Regional expressions and cultural idioms are being smoothed away for universally digestible text. Why use a colorful expression when a generic alternative will be better understood by both humans and machines?

**The Cultural Cost of Convenience**

[12] Language has always evolved with technology. But the AI revolution differs in both speed and scope. Previous technological evolutions still required humans to craft the message. AI tools fundamentally alter who—or what—is doing the crafting.

[13] Author Lian Wei warns of “the end of linguistic fingerprints.” She explained: “Every person speaks with patterns as unique as fingerprints. AI-mediated communication is replacing these with statistically optimized expressions that belong to no one and everyone.”

[14] Language carries cultural knowledge and community identity. When we outsource our expression to algorithms, we lose connections to deeper layers of meaning. When “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” becomes “Don’t assume success before it happens”—something vital is lost.

**Resisting the Flattening**

[15] Despite these concerns, resistance is emerging. Writers like Zadie Smith have committed to AI-free composition. Literary journals have established “human-only” submission categories. Most promising is the emergence of “AI-illegible” writing styles: deliberately unpredictable and linguistically mischievous writings that make it difficult for AI to replicate.

[16] If language is, as philosopher Wittgenstein suggested, the limit of our world, then the flattening of language means the flattening of our world. In a world increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence, preserving the beautiful inconsistencies of human language may be our most important cultural project. Because once the Great Language Flattening is complete, we may find ourselves with perfect communication but nothing uniquely human left to say.

Read the Text and answer the following questions.

1. Find a word in paragraph 1-3 that has a similar meaning to “combination”.

blend

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1. Find a word in paragraph 3-5 that has a similar meaning to “regularly”.

routinely

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1. According to Paragraph 3-5, are the following statements True (T), False (F) or Not Given (NG)?

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|  | **T** | **F** | **NG** |
| **(i) The Pew survey indicated that roughly half of professional writers use AI tools for content generation.** |  |  |  |
| (ii) Marcus Wheeler believes his natural writing is more effective than AI-generated content. |  |  |  |

1. Complete the following sentence based on information given in Paragraph 6-8. Write **ONE** word in each blank. You should make sure your answers are **grammatically correct**, e.g., part of speech, tenses, and plurals.

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| Bland writing produced by AI language models is a result of (i) evolution, in which they learned to choose a statistical middle path with language, creating a "Goldilocks zone of blandness". This problem intensifies as humans start to (ii) internalize these patterns, leading writers to unconsciously cater their style to the AI. As a result, university professors are observing increasingly (iii) homogeneous writing from students. |

1. What does the observation that “Sometimes I’m not talking to the guy; I’m talking to his bot” suggest about the nature of online communication?
2. It is becoming more efficient and streamlined.
3. It fosters deeper and more authentic connections.
4. It encourages greater human creativity in language.
5. It risks becoming an interaction with algorithms rather than people.
6. When the article states, “We’re losing linguistic diversity,” what is the implied consequence for human expression?
7. People will become more adept at nuanced communication.
8. The range of human emotions conveyable through language will expand.
9. The richness and variety of ways humans express themselves will diminish.
10. Communication will become more precise and lower the chance of misinterpretation.

Complete the following sentence based on information given in Paragraph 12-14. Write ONE word in each blank. You should make sure your answers are **grammatically correct**, e.g., part of speech, tenses, and plurals.

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| AI tools rapidly revolutionize the entity that (i) crafts the messages, threatening "linguistic fingerprints". This outsourcing of expression to algorithms results in the loss of deeper cultural (ii) connections / meaning. |

1. What does the word “these” in Paragraph 13 refer to?

Linguistic fingerprints

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1. According to Paragraph 12-14, are the following statements True (T), False (F) or Not Given (NG)?

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|  | **T** | **F** | **NG** |
| **(i) AI revolutionizes language by fundamentally changing who performs the crafting of messages.** |  |  |  |
| (ii) AI-mediated communication helps preserve cultural knowledge and community identity. |  |  |  |

1. What does the emergence of “AI-illegible” writing styles primarily suggest about human response to language flattening?
2. People are unwillingly accepting the inevitable dominance of AI in communication.
3. Writers are actively seeking ways to differentiate human creativity from algorithmic outputs.
4. The literary community is trying to integrate AI tools effectively into creative processes.
5. There is a general decline in the quality of human writing when compared to AI.