ENGLISH 5365

Spring 2004
TR 11:00-12:20
357 English Bldg

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, GENDERED INTERFACES & DISCOURSE STUDIES

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is situated at the intersection of discourse studies, cultural studies, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is designed to explore some of the methods through which AI designers build humanlike, conversational interfaces, machines designed to interact “naturally” with humans. What are the assumptions about human interaction, gender, communication, and how users interact with machines that inform the design of such interfaces? What challenges do designers of artificial humans face? What are the benefits and drawbacks of such interfaces? How is humanness mediated discursively? In what ways do we verify the humanness of others, particularly when we are engaged in a chat room discussion? What can discourse studies and cultural studies teach us about intelligent interface design? We will work through these and other questions this semester. What does it mean to be human, and what are some approaches to simulating humanness?

This course also partially satisfies the methods requirement for doctoral students in TCR. As such, we will spend a significant amount of time reading and talking about discourse analysis (DA) as a qualitative research methodology. We will cover the major approaches and theories to analyzing discourse. We will also focus on methods of doing discourse analysis, especially the approach to DA called “critical discourse analysis.” What is the relationship between discourse and being human?

Here are two ways to think about the course:

1) This is a qualitative methods course that uses AI as a source of data to be analyzed.
2) This is a humanities course in AI that uses discourse analysis to help us better understand what it means to be human—i.e. to talk and write and interact as human, language-using, social beings.

One ongoing challenge for us will be to forge connections between AI and DA. As you may know, there has not been much scholarly attention in the DA literature to computer technology and AI. This challenge will provide a number of opportunities for us to discuss how (or whether) to apply a particular theory or method of discourse to a domain for which it might not have been intended.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Purchase the books from the campus bookstore. If they are not yet available at the bookstore and are not due to be delivered to the bookstore by the end of the second week of classes, then you should purchase
them from barnesandnoble.com immediately. (Avoid amazon.com because of a delay in delivering these particular texts.)


In addition to the required books, there are a number of required supplemental readings. These readings are available on e-reserve (see link below). Print out these supplemental readings, read them carefully, and bring them to class on the days assigned.

**COURSE MATERIALS ONLINE**

Course materials: [http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/5365](http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/5365). Required supplemental readings are on e-reserve: go to [http://library.ttu.edu/ul/](http://library.ttu.edu/ul/), click “Course/E-Reserve,” and search by instructor.

**GRADING**

Your final course grade will be determined according to the table below, using the standard curve of 90-100% = A; 80-89.9% = B; 70-79.9% = C; 60-69.9% = D; 0-59.9% = F. Under no circumstances will grades be rounded up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading responses</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading the discussion</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presenting an AI application or resource</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper/project</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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**ASSIGNMENTS**

**Reading responses**

Respond to the week’s reading assignments in a tightly focused, single-spaced, one-page, typewritten response. Put your name, the date, and a descriptive title at the top of the page. Also include a list of the reading assignments you are responding to. Your response should address a question, concern, or problem of interest to you and aim to synthesize the readings into themes, topics, etc. Try to make connections between readings that appear to be dissimilar (i.e. discourse analysis and AI readings). Responses are due
on Thursdays before 11:00 a.m. (See the schedule for due dates.) Email the response to me (sean.zdenek@ttu.edu) as a Word attachment. I will gather the responses together and send them to the whole class via email.

**Short paper**
Compose a five (5) page, double-spaced, typewritten paper that explores an issue at the intersection of artificial intelligence and discourse studies. Your paper should also analyze a small set of discourse from a discourse analytic perspective we’ve discussed in class. Think of the short paper as an opportunity to analyze and synthesize the readings in the first half of the course, and as a trial run on a possible end-of-the-term project.

**Leading the discussion**
Lead the class in a discussion of one of the assigned readings. I’ll pass around a sign-up sheet in week two so you can sign up for one of the readings. Prepare a handout for the class (make copies for everyone) that 1) summarizes the reading, 2) connects the reading to at least one other assigned reading, a recurring theme, or a theory we’ve covered in class, and 3) includes 3-5 questions for discussion. The summary portion of your presentation should last about 5 minutes. The discussion portion of your presentation should last about 15-20 minutes.

**Presenting an AI application or resource**
Present an AI application or Internet resource to the class. For example, you might choose to present one or more software applications from one of the AI-inspired labs at MIT’s Media Lab. You will need to present your resource or application to us by making use of the instructor’s station and projection screen in the classroom. As part of your presentation, connect your application or resource to one or more of the readings or issues we’ve discussed in class.

**Final project**
Design a seminar paper or project that explores a topic of interest. The final product should be of superior quality, suitable for presentation at a national conference and/or publication (following revision). Your paper or project should serve as the culmination of your work over the semester by 1) connecting AI and discourse analysis, 2) analyzing a set of data from a discourse analytic perspective, and 3) including secondary research (i.e. course readings but also other materials such as journal articles that we did not read in class). You will present your final project during the last week of class.

**COURSE POLICIES**

- Be prepared for class by doing the assigned reading and writing in advance
- Be on time for class
- Expect to attend every class meeting. The success of the course depends upon your regular attendance. If you are absent more than three (3) times, your final course grade will be reduced 3% for each absence after three. Six or more absences will warrant a failing grade in the course. In general, I do not excuse absences.
- See me during the first two weeks of class to discuss your special needs or ADA accommodations, if any
- Expect to participate actively in class discussions
- Respect the views of others
- Always cite your sources in your writing – i.e. do not plagiarize. See me immediately if you have questions about the university’s policy on plagiarism. (See p. 49 of the University Catalog for the official policy on academic integrity.)
- Submit your work on time. Late work is penalized 10% per day. Assignments more than five days late will not be accepted.
- Feel free to discuss course questions and concerns with me during office hours, by appointment, or via email. I will do my best to respond to your email queries within 24 hours, except during weekends and holidays.