

Effects of Algorithmic Standardization on Discursive Practices in Organizational Settings

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Abstract

This article explores the profound transformations that have affected linguistic practices within contemporary organizations, under the growing influence of automated language technologies. Digital tools such as autocorrect, neural machine translators, and smart writing assistants are promoted as means to achieve efficiency and clarity in professional communication. However, they also lead to a form of excessive standardization of language in the workplace. This standardization is not a neutral procedure; rather, it tends to erase subjectivity, individual stylistic forms, and socio-linguistic diversity, which leads to impoverishing the richness of expression within the professional scope. Furthermore, this linguistic unification operates as a hidden mechanism of symbolic adjustment, through imposing implicit linguistic standards dictated by organizational structures themselves. By using tools from critical sociolinguistics and the sociology of organizations, the article adopts a critical approach seeking to unpack the tensions between the demand for efficiency, the dominance of hierarchical authority, and the right to individual expression. It also highlights how technology, through its linguistic mediation, reshapes social and symbolic relationships in the workplace, which reveals the increasing role of automated language in reproducing power, standardization, and regulation in the contemporary professional world.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary professional environment is witnessing an intensified presence of digital technologies, which currently structure different forms of interaction and written expression within organizations. From emails to collaborative platforms, to instant messaging systems and project management software programs, digital media have become a foundational infrastructure in organizational environments. Within this rapid technological context, a category of automated linguistic tools has emerged, which does not merely reshape communication channels but also reformulates the linguistic structure of discourse. These tools include advanced proofreaders, network-based machine translation systems, and generative AI-based writing assistants. These tools have become influential invisible companions that play a decisive role in modern professional writing practices (Vaswani, et al., 2017). Their widespread use is very often justified with reasons related to efficiency, clarity, speed, and professionalism. They are promoted as means to equalise linguistic differences, facilitate intercultural understanding, and accelerate the production of standardized documents; as they appear to offer a simple technological solution to the complexities of human communication, especially in organizational contexts that place high

importance on employee performance and commitment to predefined standards. However, the widespread of these tools use, often encouraged or even imposed by internal policies, has led to a situation where such algorithmic aids are not just an option but an implicit rule and an expected competency of the modern employee.

In the face of this rapid integration of digital media, a fundamental question arises: Are automated language tools merely assistive tools for professional linguistic expression and neutral mechanisms to enhance communication quality and efficiency? Or do they, perhaps unintentionally, contribute to the establishment of a new form of symbolic regulation of language, and eventually of actors within the workplace? Stated differently, does not “improving communication” through algorithms hide a tendency toward standardising discourse, limiting expressive diversity, and imposing standard language patterns that serve specific organizational interests? This question is situated within a broader reflection on the relationship between language, power, and technology in contemporary societies. Language has never been merely a means for transmitting information; it is also a means of self-expression, a marker of identity, a space for symbolic struggles, and an instrument of power (Bourdieu, 1982; Fairclough, 2014). As Foucault noted, the “order of discourse”

—the totality of rules, norms, and constraints that govern what can be said, who can say it, and how— is closely tied to structures of power (Foucault, 1971). Accordingly, the rise of algorithms capable of analysing, correcting, translating, and even generating language on a large scale raises a pivotal question: Who determines the rules of this new digital “discursive system”, and what are the implications for the actual discursive practices of actors within organizational settings?

This study hypothesizes that the standardization of language through algorithms—resulting from the widespread use of digital linguistic tools—leads to a form of "neutralization" of professional discourse. This neutralization manifests on several levels: on the one hand, it obliterates subjective traits, idiosyncratic stylistic patterns, sociolectal diversity, and non-standard linguistic registers; on the other hand, it reduces the margins for alternative linguistic practices that might deviate from the dominant organizational discourse. By adopting a soft, consensual language consistent with the assumed expectations of hierarchical authority or the dominant organizational culture, these tools contribute to the impoverishment of discursive diversity and limit the space available for individual and collective expression within workplace settings. Through linking critical socio-linguistic analysis with a socio-organizational

perspective, this article seeks to offer a profound critical analytical reading of the literature that has discussed the complex challenges posed by the increasing automation of language in the workplace. The article also aims to contribute to a more accurate understanding of the dynamics associated with symbolic power in the digital age and to open horizons for thinking on ways to manage linguistic practices within organizational environments in a conscious and comprehensive manner.

2. The Techno-Linguistic Shift in Organizational Settings

Computer-assisted linguistic support is not a completely new phenomenon. Primitive spelling correction tools, integrated into word processing software since the 1980s, were already a basic form of technological intervention in writing. However, their scope of intervention was limited to detecting major and obvious errors. The real transformation has occurred over the past two decades, influenced by the convergence of a number of factors: the explosion of computing power, the wide availability of digital texts known as "linguistic big data," and the significant advances in Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) techniques, particularly thanks to statistical approaches and then deep neural networks (DNNs) (Manning & Schütze, 1999; Jurafsky & Martin, 2009). As a result of this transformation, we have moved from

simple tools limited to lexical verification to advanced systems capable of conducting precise analyses at the grammatical, semantic, and stylistic levels, sometimes reaching the point of complete paraphrasing or producing texts almost independently.

Today, various types of technological linguistic tools are present in organizational environments, often interconnected and integrated into broader software suites. Their functionalities complement each other to form a coherent system that enhances automated language processing and guides and standardizes discourse performance to meet organizational efficiency and standard communication requirements. Examples include advanced grammar and style assistants such as Grammarly, Antidote, and ProWritingAid; enhanced functionalities in Microsoft Editor and Google Workspace; and neural machine translation (NMT) tools, which have revolutionized the quality of automated translation. Services such as DeepL, Google Translate, and Microsoft Translator are now highly attractive to organizations operating internationally, being used to translate emails, internal documents, marketing materials, software interfaces, and even facilitate instant communication during videoconferences.

Furthermore, writing assistants and text generators (generative AI) known as large language models (LLMs), such as

OpenAI's GPT series, Google's LaMDA/Gemini, Meta's LLaMA, and Anthropic's Claude, have marked the beginning of a new era of on-demand text generation (Brown, Mann, Ryder, Subbiah, & Kaplan, 2020). Their rapid integration into everyday work tools (such as Microsoft 365 Copilot, Google Duet AI, Notion AI, and others) has accelerated their widespread use across all text-generating tasks, making "prompt engineering"—the art of crafting effective instructions for AI—an emerging and highly sought-after skill.

Additionally, human resources (HR) sector, along with marketing and strategic monitoring, are also seeing increasing investment in these technologies. Automated systems are used to scan and semantically analyse thousands of CVs or cover letters to assess their compatibility with pre-defined job profiles (often generated by artificial intelligence), formulate standard job descriptions, and analyse the content of annual interviews, employee feedback, or satisfaction surveys to extract general trends or so-called "organizational sentiment" (Autor, 2015; Tambe, Cappelli, & Yakubovich, 2019). While these tools promise to make HR processes more objective and rapid, they also raise significant ethical issues, particularly those related to discrimination and hidden biases (Bolukbasi, Chang, Zou, Saligrama, & Kalai, 2016).

The widespread and rapid adoption of these tools is a response to a global organizational logic. They are often presented as an extension of what is known as “administrative common sense”, aimed at achieving maximum efficiency and productivity. Automating linguistic tasks—often described as repetitive or time-consuming—is seen as an ideal way to save time and reduce costs, particularly those related to proofreading, human translation, or editing standard documents (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). The need for standardization and quality control remains crucial, particularly within large institutions, in highly regulated sectors (such as banking and pharmaceuticals), or for companies that place great importance on their corporate image. These tools provide a degree of linguistic consistency, compliance with visual and terminological guidelines, and ensure a more controlled, professional, and consistent external communication. In a competitive environment where communication is a pillar of corporate reputation, there is an increasing need for technologies that are supposed to eliminate errors and confusing or ambiguous expressions. There is also a normative and traditional dimension that cannot be overlooked: the adoption of such tools by competitors or industry leaders, in addition to their intensive promotion by software developers and consultants, creates a sense of urgency to keep up with digital transformation and a fear of falling behind technologically. Indeed, in some

contexts, the matter goes beyond optionality to become almost mandatory, either imposed or strongly encouraged in internal policies and integrated into performance indicators or evaluation criteria. Thus, these tools evolve from a mere optional aid to a fully required instrument.

Moreover, the rapid and widespread dissemination of these tools has led to the normalization of their use and their familiarity as part of daily practices. The almost regular reliance on advanced proofreading tools, the automatic translation of foreign-language emails, or even the generation of first drafts by artificial intelligence are all familiar behaviours that have become integrated into daily work routines, often without any questioning or critical reflection (Orlikowski, 2000). In this sense, professional writing is undergoing a profound transformation into a hybrid process, based on the co-construction of humans and machines, where the algorithm is gradually becoming more dominant in content creation, with a tangible decline in the clarity of its impact and our perception of it.

However, this normalization also leads to troubling side effects. It hides ideological choices, cultural biases, and technical limitations embedded in these tools, in addition to gradually reshaping the structure of produced language and perhaps

even the very ways of thinking (Noble, 2018; Zuboff, 2019).

One of the most significant structural and profound effects of this algorithmic mediation is the establishment, and often reinforcement, of a tangible gap between spontaneous language—that which an individual produces naturally, with all its richness, diversity, and personal nuances, along with its implicit intentions and potential formal "deficiencies"—and the language produced after the tool's intervention, whether corrective, translational, or generative. By their algorithmic design, these tools tend to simulate what is known as "described language" or "model language"; language that is defined, interpreted, and implemented based on linguistic standards that are determined and encoded by the algorithms inherent in the structure of the technical system.

It is worth noting that this "prescribed language" is neither neutral, nor universal, nor absolutely objective. Rather, it is a circumstantial product conditioned by several intertwined factors. It is the result of design choices made by developers (such as prioritizing clarity over semantic nuances, or preferring formality over expressiveness), as well as the nature and quality of the data used to train AI models; data that may contain substantial linguistic, cultural, or social biases. Additionally, the goals that organizations assign to these tools when using them (such as seeking

standardization, compliance with legal standards, or enhancing corporate image) also contribute to shaping the characteristics of this language. There are also structural limitations still constraining these techniques, such as the difficulty of understanding deep contexts, absorbing allusions, or interpreting ironic expressions and indirect connotations. Consequently, the prescribed language produced by these tools often conveys a particular—and perhaps reductive—conception of what "good professional discourse" should be, tending to privilege certain linguistic registers (such as refined corporate language or prevailing administrative discourse) at the expense of other forms of expression that may be legitimate, even richer, and more appropriate in certain contexts (Cameron, 2012; Phillipson, 1992).

The gap between spontaneous language and language produced by algorithmic mediation is tangibly manifested through a number of observable linguistic phenomena that contribute to a form of linguistic impoverishment or standardization:

a) **Stylistic and Lexical Impoverishment:** these tools, optimized for clarity, brevity, and perceived effectiveness, tend to favour simple and straightforward linguistic structures, often at the expense of complex syntactic style or multi-level argumentative structure. They also favour the use of common and straightforward vocabulary,

often devoid of emotional expression or stylistic suggestion. These tools may even discourage—or automatically "correct"—the use of rhetorical devices (such as metaphor and hyperbole), subtle markers (like intensifiers and adverbs), irony, wordplay, or the adoption of more complex or personal registers, as these are viewed as potential sources of ambiguity or what is referred to as "communicative noise" (Bender, Gebru, McMillan-Major, & Shmitchell, 2021). Thus, an email containing a carefully worded expression of concern, or a creative suggestion phrased in metaphorical language, may be reformulated by an intelligent assistant into a dull, familiar statement, losing some of its persuasive power, emotional payload, and true communicative intent.

b) Erasure of Personal, Social, and Cultural Features: language, at its core, carries the imprint of the speaker's or writer's identity. It includes linguistic variations related to geographical origin (such as dialects or region-specific lexical and syntactic features), social belonging (group language), age, gender, or even a unique personal style; what is known as idiosyncratic expression. These traits are often interpreted by algorithms as "errors," "deviations" from the unified linguistic norm, or indicators of "lack of professionalism". As a result, they are systematically monitored, corrected, or eliminated within a technical process that seeks linguistic normalization. This

process leads to a gradual homogenization of discourses, where the distinctive individual voice—that is, the person's own "language"—finds difficulty in emerging and is sometimes even met with discouragement and deliberate erasure (Noble, 2018). Using culturally charged idiomatic expressions, adopting a more casual language level within a given context, or displaying a clear degree of subjectivity are all practices that may be suppressed or mitigated by the tool's suggestions, pushing the user toward a more neutral and impersonal style of expression.

c) The Growing Standardization of Formats and Discursive Patterns: the effects of these tools are not limited to the micro-linguistic level (vocabulary, sentences), but extend to a higher level, where they encourage the adoption of standardized textual forms, patterns, and structures for recurring discourse patterns, such as ready-made email templates, templated meeting minutes, reports organized according to pre-formulated templates, and presentations based on predefined models. Generative AI techniques demonstrate particular prowess in producing this type of standardized text. While this standardization may contribute to improving the readability, comparability, and efficiency of content in terms of large-scale processing, it also significantly limits the flexibility of discourse and the creativity and adaptability that allow

information to be communicated in diverse and innovative ways depending on the context and situation. As a result, the structure of discourse, the organization of ideas, and the choice of arguments become increasingly subject to ready-made templates and implicit algorithmic expectations (Bender, Gebru, McMillan-Major, & Shmitchell, 2021).

d) Reinforcement of Biases and Systemic Errors: paradoxically, digital linguistic tools do not always fulfil their recurring promise of achieving "linguistic perfection". Machine translators—despite significant progress—sometimes still result in serious errors of meaning, literal translations that strip the source text of its cultural and contextual significance, and even slip into inappropriate or culturally unfamiliar expressions (Koehn & Knowles, 2017). As for language correction tools, they may impose hypercorrected or controversial grammatical rules, obscure innovative or domain-specific linguistic structures, and fail to detect many subtle semantic errors. What is even more concerning is that text generators based on Large Language Models (LLMs) have demonstrated performance that tends to "hallucinate," producing factually incorrect information in a convincing and trustworthy manner. They also tend to reproduce and even amplify the biases—social, racial, and gender—embedded in the big data on which these language models are trained (Bender, Gebru,

McMillan-Major, & Shmitchell, 2021; Bolukbasi, Chang, Zou, Saligrama, & Kalai, 2016). With the rise of automation bias, users may become overconfident in the performance of these tools, adopting these errors or biases without critical examination, thus contributing to their reproduction and dissemination within organizational discourses.

The techno-linguistic transformation is not merely an update of writing tools; it represents a deep shift in discursive practices within organizational environments. By establishing a widening gap between spontaneous language and prescribed language dictated by algorithms, this transformation contributes to the consolidation of a standardized, functional mode of communication. While this may be more formally efficient, it carries the risk of impoverishing expression and depersonalizing language. Despite the justifications offered for this trend—such as the demand of efficiency and professionalism—the entire process is not neutral in terms of values or social influences. As we will demonstrate in more detail below, this linguistic standardization is intrinsically linked to the stakes of power, control mechanisms, and the establishment of normative legitimacy within organizational settings.

3. Standard Language and the Legitimation of Norms: The Hidden Power of Algorithms

Among the most effective mechanisms of power in the context of algorithmic standardization is the ability of automated linguistic tools to present the standards they apply as objective, universal, and purely technical. Grammatical correction, stylistic improvement, synonym suggestion, and automatic rephrasing are all presented, whether by designers or within institutional discourse, as mere technical aids aimed at enhancing "clarity," "effectiveness," "consistency," and "professionalism" in communication (Gillespie, 2018; Fairclough, 2014). These characteristics are essential virtues in the world of contemporary organizations; they are presented as neutral and universally desirable goals, while concealing ideological choices and preconceived normative assumptions. As Langdon Winner demonstrated, technical tools, contrary to their supposed neutrality, are not free of political dimensions (Winner, 1980). Rather, they embed specific patterns of power and domination.

Therefore, the fundamental question remains: Who determines the standards for "good professional language" that algorithms apply? The answer to this question is complex and multifactorial. Algorithms are not inherently independent or neutral entities; instead, they are the product of accumulated human decisions. They are designed by engineers and linguists, each of whom has their own representations of what constitutes

"legitimate language." These algorithms are trained on massive corpora of texts that reflect the prevailing usages and structural biases of the societies to which they belong, and their settings are adjusted according to objectives set by the developing companies and the commercial entities marketing them, in line with market logic and customer expectations from institutions and organizations (Noble, 2018; O'Neil, 2016). For example, algorithm training data is often derived from extensive textual sources from the European or North American context, recorded in standard linguistic registers, which results in a structural bias against non-standard linguistic patterns or minority linguistic varieties (Bender, Gebru, McMillan-Major, & Shmitchell, 2021).

Accordingly, the linguistic standards encoded within tools like Grammarly for proofreading, DeepL for translation, or text generators like ChatGPT are not random outcomes or a reflection of absolute linguistic truth. Rather, they systematically tend to perpetuate and reinforce dominant linguistic and cultural practices. In the context of economic globalization, this is often manifested through the active promotion of a standardized form of English, variously termed "Managerial English," "Business English," or "Globish." This standardized form of language is characterized by its idiosyncratic vocabulary—often borrowed from the fields of marketing, technology, or

financial lexicon— a simplified grammatical structure, and a tendency toward euphemism, which obscures national, regional, and cultural variations. Thus, it is reproduced as a common language of communication (*lingua franca*) in international contexts, at the expense of linguistic diversity and the richness of other languages (Phillipson, 1992; Crawford, 2021). Similarly, within organizations operating within specific national contexts (such as Arab or Francophone environments, for example), these tools may push users toward adopting an official, written, and standardized linguistic register, often based on academic or administrative standards. This leads to the implicit marginalization of regional dialects, the language of a particular social group, informal or oral linguistic patterns, as well as unfamiliar or creative forms of expression, even if these formulas are more effective or appropriate in certain communicative contexts within the organization.

The hidden and effective nature of this normative legitimation lies in its invisible nature, a property enhanced by technological mediation. The user does not interact with a clearly defined human authority (such as a proofreader or administrator) whose judgment they can challenge or whose standards they can negotiate. Instead, they interact with an abstract software interface that offers them "suggestions" in the form of "objective"

improvements (e.g., "suggest more clarity," or "a specific correction for brevity"), which they gradually accept and integrate into their writing practice, often without critical scrutiny, until they implicitly accept the tool's standard as the only acceptable and legitimate one. In this way, the authority of the algorithm, presented as technical, rational, and therefore neutral, replaces social or hierarchical authority, making it difficult to question the standard or question its validity (Noble, 2018). This intersects with "verbal hygiene," developed by Deborah Cameron, to describe the recurring tendency within societies to "purify" language of perceived impurities, errors, or deviations, often under the banner of an ideology of "clarity" and "correctness" (Cameron, 2012). In this context, algorithmic tools are presented as the ideal tools for implementing this "verbal hygiene" on a large scale; they engage in a continuous, impersonal, and seemingly immune to debate or challenge. These tools effectively normalize certain linguistic forms —those compatible with the model within them— so that they appear to be the only "correct," "professional," or "effective" form of expression, while other alternative forms, including the diversity inherent in any living language, are marginalized or excluded as mere anomalies.

This form of legitimation becomes more effective the more it is based on the apparent technical performance of digital

tools. When these technologies quickly and often accurately correct obvious spelling errors, translate texts seamlessly, or generate consistent content in seconds, they gain credibility and an aura of infallibility. Users find themselves less inclined to question ideological or cultural foundations or question potential biases perpetuated by the standards embedded in the tool. Technical prowess thus conceals the power relations and standardizing choices that contribute to shaping what is presented as "legitimate" or "correct" language from the algorithm's perspective. Technology thus no longer remains merely a neutral tool; it transforms into an implicit normative authority, whose influence grows stronger the more it appears objective and efficient.

The imposition of linguistic norms, even through technological tools that appear seemingly neutral and innocent, is not without consequences for individuals and social relations. This normative obligation can be analyzed precisely through the concept of symbolic violence, a central concept in the thought of Pierre Bourdieu. Symbolic violence, as Bourdieu conceptualizes it, is a form of soft domination, often invisible and unconscious, exercised not through physical force, but rather through the imposition of a system of meanings, categories of perception, and evaluative norms (i.e., schemas of habitus) that are considered legitimate by those subjected to

them (Bourdieu, 1982). In this context, language constitutes a privileged domain for the exercise of this type of violence, as mastery of "legitimate language"—that is, the language valued by dominant institutions such as schools, the state, organizational institutions, and their technical tools—represents a crucial symbolic capital. Possessing this capital enables an individual to navigate successfully within the social space and grants them recognition and the ability to self-actualize. Those who do not master this standard linguistic pattern, or who adopt marginalized linguistic forms, are vulnerable to exclusion, misunderstanding, and even disdain.

In the contemporary organizational context, automated linguistic tools can become effective instruments of symbolic violence. By constantly correcting what is considered a deviation from the linguistic norm they embody, these tools serve as a constant reminder of the "legitimate linguistic order." Every corrective suggestion, every warning about an expression labelled "incorrect" or "unprofessional," may be perceived by the user as a form of symbolic violence, an implicit judgment on their linguistic competence, or perhaps the legitimacy of their voice within the organization. An employee whose personal style is consistently violated, whose regional or social expressions are systematically suppressed, whose language is judged as

inappropriate by algorithmic standards, or whose native language is not considered to be in line with the dominant language within the organization, may end up internalizing a sense of inferiority; that their way of expressing themselves — whether spoken or written— is wrong, substandard, or professionally inadequate. This process of internalizing the dominant norm, coupled with the covert marginalization of non-standard linguistic varieties, occurs efficiently and invisibly, as it passes through a technological medium that is perceived as neutral, objective, and even helpful and supportive (such as personal writing aids). Thus, the machine becomes an effective means of implementing the normative pressure exerted by the organization on workers, employees, and the professional groups to which it belongs.

This ongoing normative pressure, resulting from daily interaction with digital language tools, gradually leads to a form of "linguistic submission", often unconscious. To avoid symbolic punishment —in the form of repeated corrections or feelings of inadequacy— and to conform to the assumed expectations of managers, colleagues, or clients (who likely use the same tools and share the same implicit norms), individuals may self-censor their spontaneous expression and voluntarily adopt the language recommended by the tool, even if it does not align with their deep communicative intent, personal style, or

individual identity. This increases the tendency toward language standardization within the organization: emails become similar, work reports all adopt the same neutral structure and style, and presentations use the same expressive templates and repetitive, familiar terminology. However, this linguistic homogeneity is not merely a result of the pursuit of efficiency. Rather, it is essentially the product of a hidden normative pressure that compels individuals to adhere to what is described as "the correct language"; one endorsed by the invisible authority of the algorithm, which in turn embodies the prevailing cultural and authoritarian norms within the organization.

The phenomena of linguistic uniformity and expressive submission can have profound consequences, particularly for professional and personal identity. Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a central element in self-construction, a marker of belonging, and a medium for conveying individual and collective culture and history (Gumperz, 1982; Bakhtin, 1982). Our unique way of speaking and writing —what is known as our "idiolect"— reveals who we are, our life paths, our values, and our relationship to the world. When individuals are forced, through technological mediation, to adopt a standardized, refined language devoid of personal privacy, they may experience a form of alienation, a loss of personal voice,

or an inability to express their individuality, creativity, or even critical thinking in the workplace. The linguistic standardization imposed by algorithms may ultimately lead to the production of "interchangeable speaking selves", whose expressions are pre-designed to conform to the functional and normative requirements of the institution, at the expense of authenticity, self-engagement, and the capacity for discursive renewal. Some researchers have gone so far as to call for "deskilling" of language skills, where the ability to employ language in a rich and personal way is eroded by the increasing reliance on technological tools (Baron, 2021).

Drawing on Michel Foucault's (1971) analysis of the "order of discourse," we can understand how these technologies contribute to the consolidation of a new, highly effective, discursive regulatory system, characterized by its automated nature and its deep roots in the collective unconscious of actors. The rules that determine what can be said, who has the right to say it, under what circumstances, and, most importantly, how it should be said—in terms of form, style, and legitimate vocabulary—are increasingly defined, disseminated, and monitored through algorithmic systems. This type of control, though less visible and less forceful than explicit administrative directives or direct supervision, is no less influential in shaping everyday discursive practices and even extends beyond them to

shaping subjects, social relations, and institutional culture itself. Surveillance is no longer limited to actions or outcomes (as in the "surveillance capitalism" analyzed by Zuboff, 2019), but has extended to the structure of language itself and the fabric of internal expression, thus strengthening the power of those who produce these tools—designers and corporate managers—and who define and impose—often implicitly—the standards of legitimate and "effective" language within the institution.

4. Resistance, Reappropriation, and Discursive Strategies: Agency in the Face of Algorithmic Normativity

Algorithmic language standardization is a powerful force that reshapes professional discourses and reproduces power dynamics within organizations. However, viewing this process as strictly deterministic is an oversimplification. As structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and research on patterns of technology use (Orlikowski, 2000) have demonstrated, actors cannot be reduced to mere puppets automatically subject to structural or technological constraints. They possess agency; the ability to act, interpret, negotiate, and even subvert the rules and tools imposed on them. Faced with the normative pressure exerted by automated linguistic tools, employees develop a series of strategies—often discreet, yet meaningful—to preserve spaces for expression, assert their identities, or challenge the dominant discursive order. Hence, this section

explores those forms of resistance, reappropriation, and alternative discursive strategies. We will begin by reviewing the empirical manifestations of these circumventive practices (contournement) that reintroduce the subjective dimension into dominant discourse, drawing inspiration from work on the "art of resistance" (Scott, 1992; Mumby, 2005) and the "tactics of everyday life" (De Certeau, 1980), before moving on to reflect on the conditions for developing "counter-linguistics of power" within organizational settings.

Although automated linguistic tools are designed to produce a refined, standardized language that conforms to a predetermined standard, the actual practices of users reveal a more complex and dynamic reality. Employees are not merely passive executors of algorithmic suggestions; rather, they interact with these tools in complex ways, developing "arts of doing", in the words of Michel De Certeau (1980), that allow them to adapt to constraints, maintain a margin of freedom of expression, or convey "outside the norm" meanings. These practices often fall within what James James C. Scott (1990) defines "infrapolitics" as those everyday and hidden forms of resistance that are hidden or ambiguous on the surface, but that in essence express a will for independence and constitute an implicit challenge to existing hegemony. It is a resistance that does not take the form of overt

confrontation, but rather manifests itself in the small and clever tactics practiced by actors within the organizational fabric to reintroduce subjectivity, identity, and free expression into the regulated discursive space.

Several forms of discursive tactics that resist algorithmic dominance can be identified. These tactics are often adapted and integrated into specific organizational contexts. Among the most prominent are:

a) **Resorting to Technical Terms and Coded Language:** this is one of the most common strategies for escaping algorithmic correction and linguistic standardization. Individuals deliberately resort to using specialized professional terms, internal acronyms, or coded language patterns that are unique to a particular team, field, or organizational culture. This coded language allows individuals to maintain the internal cohesion of the group, convey precise and shared meanings, and assert a distinct collective identity. By using an unrecognized technical term, an acronym specific to a particular organization, or a metaphor understood only by a "group of individuals," employees create a fortified discursive space that is inaccessible or difficult to penetrate by algorithmic standards. This is a way to reaffirm experience and belonging in the face of a technology that tends to flatten particularities and blur differences (Orlikowski, 2000).

b) The Intelligent Use of Sarcasm, Humour, and Indirect Meaning: despite significant advances in sentiment analysis, current algorithms are still unable to capture subtle non-literal meanings, such as sarcasm, irony, humour, and implicit connotations. Hence, employees can exploit this "algorithmic blind spot" to express critical positions, objections, negative feelings, or simply to demonstrate critical distance toward positions or policies, in an indirect manner that is difficult for algorithmic systems to detect (Liu, 2015; Gray & Suri, 2019). A sarcastic comment about an administrative decision, a light joke about organizational dysfunction, or a seemingly innocent but deeply suggestive remark may easily pass through the "network" of automated analysis without being detected as inappropriate or non-compliant, but they are clearly understood by human recipients.

c) Poaching and Creative Tool Modification: rather than passively and submissively receiving the tool's suggestions, some users are developing strategies for what might be called "technological poaching" (Likavčan & Scholz-Wäckerle, 2018). This involves diverting the tool from its original function to serve their own expressive goals; "poaching" (De Certeau, 1980). For example, a machine translator may be used not to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding, but rather as a means of deliberately complicating discourse, introducing calculated ambiguity, or

exploiting cultural differences and untranslatable meanings across languages. These modifications and manipulations represent a form of effective creative appropriation of technology, where the user reclaims control and uses the tool against its original regulatory and normative logic.

d) Manually and Subtly Reinserting Subjective Elements: even when employees use writing aids, they do not necessarily blindly follow all the tool's suggestions. Rather, they often practice a kind of critical selection, accepting some corrections they find useful and deliberately ignoring those that obscure their style, distort their rhetorical intent, or erase their own expressive signature. They may even reinsert subjective elements after the tool's intervention, either by deleting or modifying them, such as adverbials and meaning-restricting phrases (such as: perhaps, undoubtedly, unfortunately), personal expressions, or semantically and emotionally charged vocabulary.

e) Strategic Selection of Tools and Communication Channels: employees may deliberately avoid using language aids in certain types of communication they consider more private, sensitive, or creative. They may reserve the use of automatic correction and generation tools for formal messages addressed to the external environment or those directed at managers, while using spontaneous, personal, and informal language when communicating with colleagues or within

internal work teams. This caution takes another form through conscious control over the choice of communication channels. Instead of relying on professional emails, some may prefer to resort to informal instant messaging applications, voice calls, or even face-to-face interaction, as safer spaces free from normative surveillance and linguistic regulation. Thus, the choice of communication medium becomes a disguised act of resistance, expressing the employee's desire to preserve a margin of expressive freedom and stylistic independence within an environment characterized by intense formal regulation and adherence to norms (Stöckl & Struck, 2022; Bonini, et al., 2023).

These various strategies, often interconnected and adapted to individuals' perceived margins of maneuver, demonstrate that the process of linguistic standardization via algorithms is not an automatic and an unavoidable process.

5. CONCLUSION

The central conclusion that emerges from this analysis is the growing structural tension in the digital age. On the one hand, organizations are subject to increasing pressures related to the demands of efficiency, speed, consistency, and communicative risk management; demands that linguistic technology appears capable of meeting in an attractive and effective manner. On the other hand, the excessive

Rather, these practices reveal the continuity of human agency and the capacity of actors to devise subtle forms of resistance in order to preserve spaces for individual and collective expression. However, it must be acknowledged that these tactics, despite their symbolic significance, often remain individual, fragmented, and ineffective initiatives. They rely on hidden, dispersed, and often mentally exhausting efforts, requiring constant negotiation with the tool and a constant reconciliation between one's own style and the imposed model. They also entail implicit risks, especially if the resistance appears too overt, which could expose the person engaging in it to negative evaluation or being labelled as unprofessional or undisciplined. Thus, these forms of resistance, despite their symbolic and functional importance, do not usually undermine the organizational logic underlying algorithmic tools, nor do they radically change the discursive system or dominant norms within the institution.

standardization and dehumanization of discourse produced by these same tools threatens to weaken linguistic diversity (a human resource in itself), undermine possibilities for self-expression (a prerequisite for engagement and psychological well-being at work), stifle discursive creativity (which is vital to innovation), and may even profoundly impact freedom of critical expression within the professional sphere. How, then, can this tension be addressed?

How can the legitimate pursuit of instrumental effectiveness be reconciled with the urgent need to preserve the richness of language as an authentic human resource and create spaces for free individual and collective expression? The answer to these questions does not lie in a total rejection of the technology with an extreme and unrealistic "technophobic" tendency, nor in a naive and uncritical embrace of technological virtues. Rather, it lies in striving to achieve a dynamic balance, based on a conscious, reflective, and ethically informed critical approach to the use of these tools. This requires moving beyond the purely utilitarian view of language—which reduces it to a mere tool for transmitting information, whose performance should be improved and recognized—to consider it as a complex social practice, rooted in context, embodied in individuals, and a carrier of identity, culture, emotions, and power. Maintaining the vitality, diversity, and authenticity of language in the workplace is neither a luxury nor an obstacle to institutional performance. Rather, it is an essential condition, not only for the psychological well-being and self-engagement of stakeholders, but also for the resilience of institutions and their ability to learn, enhance their collective intelligence, and enhance their innovative capacity in a highly complex and rapidly changing world.

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