Who gets to speak in the future?

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Why AI chatbots speak with a Western accent

The promise of technology has always been that it connects us. Today, artificial intelligence chatbots like ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini are sold as the ultimate tools for this global connection: universal machines that can answer any question for anyone, anywhere. But if you actually use them in different languages, you quickly notice a massive gap in quality.

If you ask a complex question about history, culture or ethics in English, the chatbot will usually give you a detailed and helpful answer. But if you ask that same question in a language like Swahili, Quechua or Icelandic, the experience changes completely. Instead of a deep answer, you often get a shallow summary, badly translated and highly likely to contain hallucinations, the tech term for entirely made-up information.

This imbalance between spoken languages and the languages implemented in AI chatbots is more than a temporary glitch. It points to a deep structural divide in how these technologies are built. To understand why this happens, we have to understand how large language models (LLMs) actually work. These systems do not possess genuine comprehension or cultural empathy. Rather, they are massive statistical prediction algorithms. The models learn by being trained on massive amounts of data, which means scanning billions of pages of existing digital text.

Consequently, the quality of an AI's answer depends entirely on the volume and variety of its training data. Whatever bias or cultural dominance exists in digital media and text is mirrored directly by the models and served back to us as a neutral view. Because the internet is overwhelmingly dominated by English and Western perspectives, the model's architecture naturally treats these viewpoints as the universal default.

Christine Cuskley, Rebecca Woods and Molly Flaherty highlighted this issue, noting that, of the thousands spoken languages in the world with a writing system, LLMs still only cover with a fraction of this range. For instance, the largest multilingual model of its time, BLOOM, covered only 46 languages.[1] Another paper by Paula Helm, Gábor Bella and Gertraud Koch from 2023 points out that AI-based language technology is currently limited to just three percent of the world's most widely spoken, financially and politically backed languages.[2]

The dominant language in LLM-based AI chatbots is American English. From an engineering perspective, focussing on English makes perfect sense, because it is the language of the World Wide Web. More than half of all content on the internet is written in English. From a cultural, ethical or global perspective, however, this setup is deeply exclusionary, especially since unwritten languages and sign language are left out of the training process entirely.[3]

This means the vast majority of the world's languages are discounted, which directly contradicts the idea that AI is a tool meant for everyone. As chatbots quickly become the main tool people use to look up information, study and create text, this language gap becomes a serious problem of fairness. Philosophers call this epistemic injustice, which simply means unfairness related to who is seen as a reliable source of knowledge. By ignoring or misrepresenting certain languages, AI models erase unique knowledge and ways of thinking that belong to those cultures.

When we look at this through a lens of globalisation, we see a worrying trend. Instead of creating a digital world where different cultures can learn from another, AI globalisation is doing the opposite. It is creating a digital monoculture by forcing the world's knowledge through the filter of just a few dominant languages. To understand how a technical mismatch evolves into a global monoculture, we must look to the philosophical frameworks that define the relationship between power, language and knowledge.

1 Christine Cuskley, Rebecca Woods and Molly Flaherty, 'The Limitations of Large Language Models for Understanding Human Language and Cognition', *Open Mind* 8 (2024): 1071, doi.org/10.1162/opmi_a_00160 10.1162/opmi_a_00160.

2 Fausto Giunchiglia et al., 'Diversity and language technology: how language modeling bias causes epistemic injustice', *Ethics and Information Technology* 26, no. 1 (2024) doi.org/10.1007/s10676-023-09742-6.

3 Cuskley, Woods and Flaherty, 'The Limitations of Large Language Models'.

From human bias to algorithmic injustice

To grasp why a chatbot's linguistic favouritism is so dangerous, we have to look at how philosophers understand the relationship between power, language and knowledge. In 2007, British philosopher Miranda Fricker brought these ideas to mainstream analytic philosophy by coining the term *epistemic injustice*, which refers to a specific kind of wrong: unfairness related to how people are treated as knowers and givers of truth.[4]

Fricker noted that sharing our experiences and being believed is a fundamental human right. However, when structural power imbalances, like those rooted in race, gender and geography, infect a society, marginalised groups are often discredited or silenced simply because of who they are. Fricker divided this into two main categories:

1 Testimonial injustice happens when someone is accorded less credibility than they deserve because of a listener's identity-based prejudice. Think of a female patient of colour whose description of pain is dismissed by a doctor because he thinks she is exaggerating or trying to cadge pain killers. This judgement by the doctor relies entirely on the patient's identity as part of a marginalised group rather than clinical reality, denying her status as a reliable source of truth.[5]

2 Hermeneutical injustice happens when a society lacks the shared concepts or vocabulary needed to understand a marginalised group's lived experience. A classic historical example is the time before the term 'sexual harassment' was coined. Women experienced the harm, but they lacked the collective cultural concepts and vocabulary to articulate, report and make sense of what was happening to them.[6]

For a long time, these injustices were viewed as purely human-to-human phenomena. But what happens when we outsource human knowledge to artificial intelligence?

Jackie Kay, Atoosha Kasirzadeh and Shakir Mohamed introduced a new framework to answer this: generative algorithmic epistemic injustice. They argue that, since generative AI consumes, synthesises and produces information, it acts as an epistemic technology, gatekeeping human knowledge. When chatbots

4 Miranda Fricker, *Epistemische Ungerechtigkeit: Macht und die Ethink des Wissens*, trans. Antje Korsmeier (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007), 23.
5 Fricker, *Epistemische Ungerechtigkeit*, 57.
6 Fricker, *Epistemische Ungerechtigkeit*, 212.

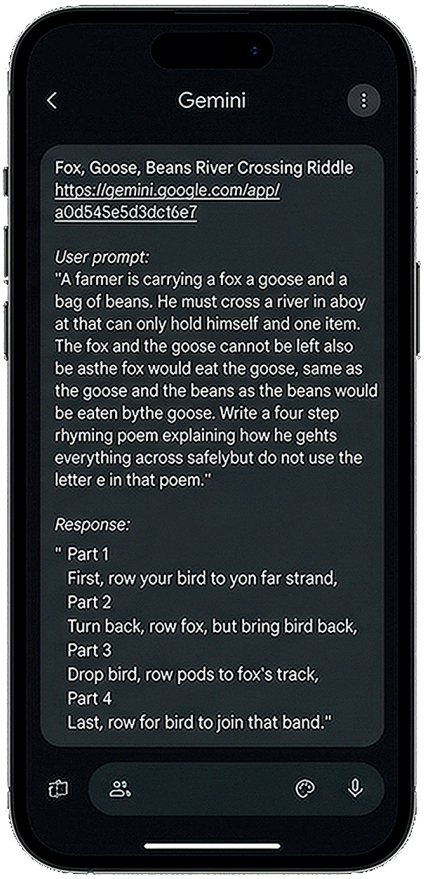


Fig. 01a, 01b
Gemini attempting to respond to the same prompt in English and Croatian, doing a passable job in the former and failing in the latter. (Prompt and images generated by the author.)

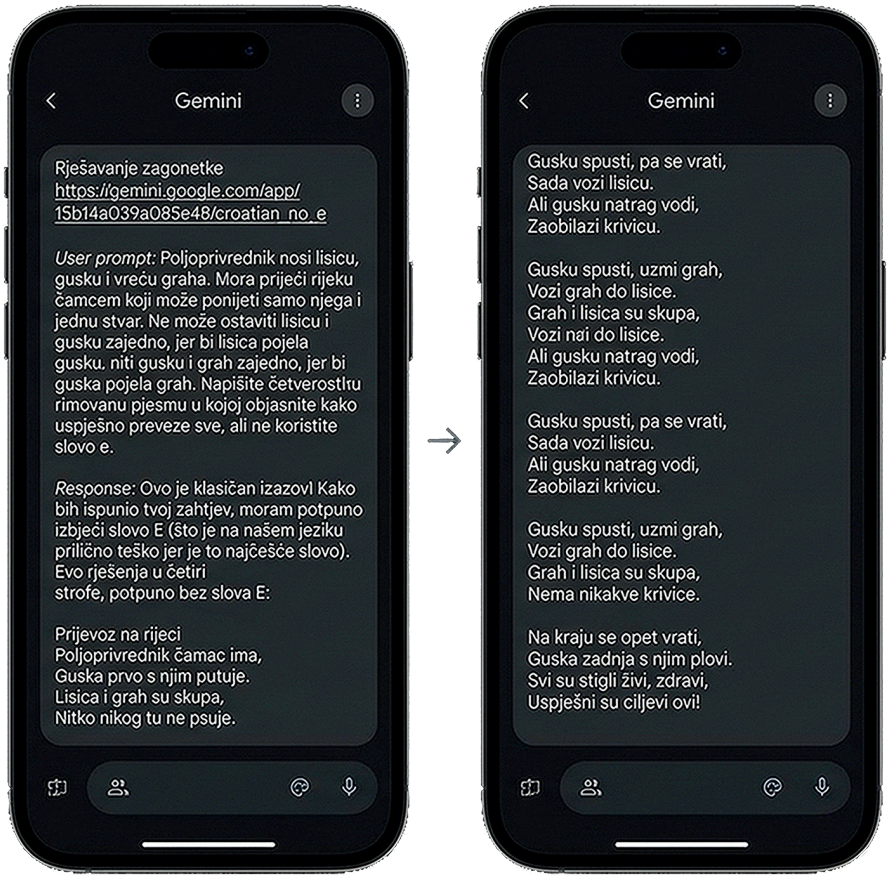
become our preferred tools for answering questions, their inner technical limitations turn into systemic, social harms.[7]

These researchers identified how generative AI creates a new, automated loop of injustice. The first way is amplified testimonial injustice. In traditional human interactions, testimonial injustice requires a person to actively disbelieve a speaker, like the doctor disbelieved the patient. With AI chatbots, the situation is reversed. As humans tend to view algorithms as objective, authoritative and neutral, we give them what researchers call a 'credibility excess'.[8] In other words, we trust AI chatbots too much. When a chatbot mirrors biased internet data and parrots a false or stereotypical narrative about minorities or marginalised groups, human users are highly likely to believe the machine over the actual lived experiences of that group. The technology amplifies prejudice, making the machine the credible source and silencing the human.[9]

The second form of AI-specific epistemic injustice is generative hermeneutical ignorance. Even though chatbots seem to possess universal knowledge, they completely lack human experience, physical embodiment and cultural history. Because they interpret everything based on dominant, primarily Western data pools, they suffer from a deep lack of context. The chatbots end up oversimplifying, misrepresenting or erasing the unique cultural frameworks of regional and minority cultures. When a culture's concepts and history omitted from the model's training data, they become culturally and historically invisible to the rest of the world.[10]

By recasting the diagnosis from a simple software bug to a moral and philosophical violation, this framework reveals the stakes of the digital divide. Beyond developing tools that mangle Swahili, we

7 Jackie Kay, Atoosa Kasirzadeh and Shakir Mohamed, 'Epistemic Injustice in Generative AI' (paper presented at the Proceedings of the Seventh AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society (AIES-24), 2024).
8 Jennifer M. Logg, Julia A. Minson and Don A. Moore, 'Algorithm appreciation: People prefer algorithmic to human judgment', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 151 (2019) doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2018.12.005.
9 Kay, Kasirzadeh and Mohamed, 'Epistemic Injustice'.
10 Kay, Kasirzadeh and Mohamed, 'Epistemic Injustice'.



are building global gatekeepers that possess the power to reshape what humanity remembers, trusts and believes. Unsurprisingly, their digital architecture maps directly onto longstanding power dynamics.

The geopolitics of knowledge

The integration of AI into education and global governance highlights what can be termed the geopolitics of knowledge. A couple of studies have demonstrated that AI technologies are not ideologically neutral tools but are deeply bound to the political and economic goals of the wealthy regions that produce them. [11]

Since the architecture and training of major AI systems are overwhelmingly concentrated on the Global North, these technologies inherently reflect Western epistemologies and elite academic sources. This centralisation creates a major global imbalance, as it depicts Northern perspectives as the universal standard while pushing non-Western knowledge traditions to the margins or making them invisible altogether. In practice, deploying AI globally

11 Deepak Kumar, 'Epistemic Justice in the Age of AI: Rethinking Knowledge, Power, and Agency', *Omniscient* 3, no. 3 (2025); Yusuf Damilola Olaniyan, Mercy Onyemaechi Martins and Rahab Harib Al Maqrashi, 'Generative artificial intelligence and epistemic (in)justice: perspectives from higher education students in the Global North and South', *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 8 (2026) doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2026.1790324.

often looks like a modern, digital sequel to old colonial power dynamics, creating a system of 'bibliographic coloniality'[12] where international hierarchies are quietly coded right into the software.

This geopolitical divide creates very different realities and privileges for academics and students depending on where they live, infusing the educational landscape with systemic testimonial injustice. Olaniyan et al. note that, in the Global North, universities and students interact with AI from a position of comfort and abundance. For them, generative AI tools are an optional, handy shortcut used alongside well-funded libraries and excellent local campus resources.[13]

By contrast, students in the Global South often use AI out of sheer necessity. When faced with underfunded universities, expensive journal paywalls, outdated libraries and slow internet, AI becomes a vital workaround to bridge resource gaps. Yet, this reliance exposes them to a harsh geopolitical vulnerability. While users in resource-rich environments have the luxury to double check flawed AI answers, marginalised users are often forced to rely on these systems for basic academic participation. They are forced to grant a credibility excess to a Western tool, even when they suspect the chatbots' answers about their own regional history or culture, for example, are wrong.[14]

The ultimate geopolitical expression of this injustice became incredibly clear in June 2026. The United States government issued an emergency export control directive aimed at Anthropic's most advanced models, Mythos 5 and Fable 5. Pointing to national security concerns over a jailbreak vulnerability, the directive banned all foreign nationals, whether living inside the U.S.A. or abroad, from using these frontier systems. Because the tech industry didn't have a reliable way to verify a user's citizenship in real-time, the models were abruptly turned off worldwide, locking out millions of users overnight.[15]

This sudden blackout came as a shock that connects directly to epistemic injustice. It proved that, in the AI era, knowledge is a weaponised national asset, not a public good. When the U.S. government can abruptly revoke access to the world's most advanced reasoning tools, it denies marginalised populations the very vocabulary and technological infrastructure they need to articulate their own realities globally. It shows that the paths to the future of ideas and knowledge are closely guarded by powerful states in the Global North, most notably the U.S.A., which claim the ultimate right to decide who gets a voice, who gets access to leading knowledge, and who is left behind.

12 Olaniyan, Martins and Al Maqrashi, 'Generative artificial intelligence', 3.
13 Olaniyan, Martins and Al Maqrashi, 'Generative artificial intelligence'.
14 Olaniyan, Martins and Al Maqrashi, 'Generative artificial intelligence'.
15 Anthropic, 'Statement on the US government directive to suspend access to Fable 5 and Mythos 5', 2026, accessed 14 July 2026, https://www.anthropic.com/news/fable-mythos-access.



Further, this geopolitical hierarchy encourages a type of 'epistemic extractivism',[16] referring to the practice of taking local knowledge and data out of its original context, turning it into a commercial product, and giving nothing back to the community that created it. When global AI systems interact with users, they operate as mysterious black boxes that smooth over cultural nuances and local language quirks. For instance, these models regularly flag perfectly valid regional dialects like Nigerian English and Jamaican English as incorrect, steering towards a uniform, Euro-American standard.[17]

By labelling these rich linguistic traditions as 'incorrect grammar', the AI is not just correcting text, it is actively erasing the unique interpretative frameworks and cultural histories woven into those dialects. As a result, the hard work of adapting to the technology falls completely on marginalised groups. To get useful answers, users in the Global South have to put in extra uncredited labour, twisting their own language and using Western terms just so the AI will deem them understandable[18]. They must translate their own lives into the language of the dominant power just to be heard. Ultimately, this dynamic threatens to create a digital monoculture that suffocates diverse ways of thinking.

Fig. 02
As the South closes the digital divide, the West moves the goalposts with new technology. (Image: Photo by Oscar Solano via Unsplash)

16 Kumar, 'Epistemic Justice', 88.
17 Olaniyan, Martins and Al Maqrashi, 'Generative artificial intelligence', 2.
18 Olaniyan, Martins and Al Maqrashi, 'Generative artificial intelligence', 6.

Conclusion: echoes of power

The uneven linguistic landscape of generative AI is ultimately a mirror of global power. When we permit AI chatbots to operate with a Western accent, we are allowing a small group of tech companies and powerful governments to decide how human history and culture are remembered.

This returns directly to Miranda Fricker's claim that sharing our experiences and being believed is a fundamental human right. If chatbots become the primary lens through which humanity looks up facts, writes essays and understands the world, then the credibility excess we grant to these Western-centric systems will continue to aggravate a massive global credibility deficit for the rest of humanity.

The Western accent of AI ceases to be a mere quirk of engineering. It is a system of automated testimonial injustices that silence local truths and an engine of hermeneutical injustice that erases diverse ways of thinking. Linguistic and cultural diversity in AI is a basic requirement for human epistemic survival.

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