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Artificial Intelligence as Communicator in Children's and YA Literature: Trust, Dialogue, and Distributed Digital Agency

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Abstract

This theoretical paper examines how contemporary children's and young adult (YA) literature imagines artificial intelligence (AI) as a communicative actor - assistant, interlocutor, narrator/voice, or infrastructure - and how these representations function as cultural scripts for interaction in the digital age. Rather than treating AI primarily as a technological theme or a risk narrative, the paper focuses on communication as form: dialogue structures, turn-taking, voicing, and the multimodal design choices that render "systemness" legible (e.g., chat bubbles, logs, feeds, dossiers). Building on child-computer interaction scholarship, the framework acknowledges that AI-mediated interfaces increasingly shape children's communicative experience and thus become narrativizable interaction norms (Bansal, 2025). It also integrates research foregrounding the ethical and affective dimensions of human-AI relations - trust, agency, intimacy, privacy, dependency, and responsibility - as central analytic variables. To operationalize these concerns across print and hybrid narrative formats, the paper proposes a replicable, step-by-step protocol: identifying AI communicative events; specifying interactional contracts; mapping ethical/affective stakes; tracking multimodal encoding; and assigning AI roles. The conceptual "results" are (1) a typology of AI communicative roles and (2) a transferable prompt set for analysing how narratives distribute agency and accountability in digitally mediated encounters. The paper concludes by outlining implications for children's literature research and AI/media literacy, while delimiting the framework's scope as a conceptual tool rather than a claim about reader effects.

Keywords: children's literature; young adult literature; artificial intelligence; multimodality; trust