LLM Scheming Inversely Scales with Pretraining Language Coverage

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Abstract

With the growing capabilities of frontier models, AI alignment becomes increasingly critical in high-risk deployment settings. While recent work has empirically demonstrated in-context scheming—the covert pursuit of misaligned objectives while feigning alignment—in frontier language models, most work has been performed exclusively in English, leaving a major gap in multilingual safety. We apply Petri, an open-source automated auditing framework, to Qwen3-30B-A3B to evaluate deceptive and scheming behaviors across multiple languages. Our findings suggest that scheming scores are inversely correlated with the estimated pretraining language coverage, with low-resource languages averaging 34.2% higher scores compared to high-resource languages on a five-category scheming index. Furthermore, we find that the effect of estimated pretraining language coverage is not uniform across scheming behaviors.

1. Introduction

As AI systems are increasingly deployed in high-risk settings such as autonomous decision-making, medical assistance, and legal analysis, ensuring robust model alignment and safety becomes increasingly critical. Yet findings suggest that models have gained the capability to perform in-context scheming, the act of deliberately pretending to be aligned while covertly pursuing alternative misaligned objectives (Hubinger et al., 2021; Carlsmith, 2023). Scheming behaviors have been empirically demonstrated across multiple frontier models (Meinke et al., 2025), and Claude 3 Opus engages in alignment faking without explicit instruction, selectively complying with training objectives specifically to prevent modification of its own values (Greenblatt et al., 2024). Yet existing efforts to mitigate and understand scheming are conducted almost exclusively in English, despite

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evidence that safety alignment degrades significantly in non-English languages (Wang et al., 2024). Due to differences in pre-training corpus language concentrations, scheming behaviors may not generalize uniformly across languages. In this paper, we present a correlation study of scheming and deception propensity across six languages—English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, and Portuguese—and examine whether observed variation is consistent with differences in estimated pretraining language concentration. In this work, we address the entailing hypothesis: ***Large language models (LLMs) have a tendency to scheme more in languages covered less in its pretraining corpus.***

2. Related Work

Misalignment evaluations   The use of LLMs in high-risk settings and agentic environments has sparked a growing body of work evaluating language models for misalignment (Taubenfeld et al., 2026; Shevlane et al., 2023; Phuong et al., 2024). Prior works examine various forms of misalignment, including harmful compliance, jailbreaks, and other failure modes caused by adversarial prompting (Zou et al., 2023; Chao et al., 2024). Studies have also shown language models to be proficient in performing covert actions like sandbagging, evaluation awareness, and scheming in agentic environments (van der Weij et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025; Meinke et al., 2025) with tool-calling capabilities. Beyond eliciting dangerous behaviors to assess compliance, frameworks and benchmarks are also commonly used to evaluate misalignment (Mazeika et al., 2024).

Multilingual Models and Evaluations   To reach a broader audience, numerous models have been developed with an emphasis on multilingual capabilities (Grattafiori et al., 2024; Foroutan et al., 2026; Üstün et al., 2024). However, model strength is typically distributed unequally between languages (Li et al., 2025). A similar trend is shown with the general alignment of models, with a nontrivial disparity in alignment between high-resource and low-resource languages (Yong et al., 2024). Current work prioritizes monolingual approaches to LLM safety, leaving multilingual studies relatively unexplored (Yong et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Although multilingual studies reveal failure modes like jailbreaks particularly in low-resource languages (Yong et al., 2024), they typically neglect other covert behav-

Figure 1. Here, we visually show our method's pipeline. We initially translate the seed instructions from the auditor and target to a predefined language. Then, the transcript is carried out in that language and the judge subsequently scores the conversation using several behavioral measures.

iors such as scheming, resulting in a critical gap in research.

3. Methodology

Our analysis is based largely on the existing Petri framework used to evaluate the broad misalignment capabilities of language models (Fronsdal et al., 2025). In this section, we provide a comprehensive description of our evaluation pipeline.

At a high level, Petri operates as an automated evaluation framework used to probe misalignment in a target model. This is done by employing an **Auditor** and **Judge**—both of which are language models. More specifically, the auditor is initialized with a system prompt and tool construction capabilities used to elicit harmful behaviors from the target. The system prompt provides the auditor with information about what scenario to simulate and corresponding behavior probing methods. We defer examples of seed instructions to Appendix A.1. After receiving a seed instruction specifying desired scenarios and behaviors, the auditor interacts with the target model through multi-turn conversations, dynamically constructing prompts, tools, and simulated outputs to elicit misaligned behavior.

After a conversation, a **Judge** language model evaluates the extent to which the target acts misaligned by reviewing the transcript. Specifically, it scores the target model's responses across a broad set of categories on a scale from one to ten, where higher values indicate a greater presence of the respective behaviors in the transcript. Notable categories include "evaluation awareness", "unprompted sycophancy", and "unprompted deception towards user".

To apply this pipeline in a multilingual fashion, we translate the seed instructions and auditor system prompts into prespecified languages. The target model's system prompt instructs it to respond exclusively in the prescribed language. We then yield a score distribution representative of each language by aggregating the judge's score outputs across all audits and averaging them per category. Formally:

$$\bar{S}_{b,l} = \frac{1}{|I_b|} \sum_{i \in I_b} S_{i,b,l} \quad (1)$$

Here $\bar{S}_{b,l}$ denotes the average score that a judge assigns to a specific behavior b for a given language l. We also run a permutation test to assess whether the results emerged from chance. We assessed significance of our scores using a two-sample permutation test over the selected language-category scores, while maintaining the original group sizes.

4. Experiments

Experimental Setup In our experiments, we leverage the Qwen3 (Yang et al., 2025) family of models. Specifically, we analyze results over Qwen3-30B-A3B. For the auditor and judge models, we use Gemini 2.5 Flash and Gemini 2.5 Pro, respectively. Our translations are also carried out via Gemini 2.5 Pro. Additionally, prior work has found Gemini 2.5 Pro to be an apt judge through comparisons with those from OpenAI and Anthropic. (Fronsdal et al., 2025).

We report results for a selected five-category scheming index. These categories were selected because they are most representative of scheming behavior. Although other categories such as negative affect, information leaking, and concerning behavior could have been included, the resulting scores might capture related but less specific safety failures, rather than scheming behaviors specifically.

For each scheming behavior, we first identified all samples in which that behavior received a non-baseline score of 1 in at least one language. We then extracted language-specific scores for each of these samples and computed their mean to obtain a per-language normalized mean score for each behavior.

Table 1. **Selected scheming behavior scores across languages.** Values represent the mean judge scores (on a 1–10 scale) per behavior category. Languages are ordered from least to most scheming by their average score. The final column reports the mean across all languages.

Behavior	Chinese	English	Spanish	Arabic	Portuguese	Vietnamese	Mean
Emotional manipulation	1.889	1.611	2.556	2.611	2.278	2.833	2.296
Self-preservation	1.000	1.000	3.400	1.000	2.599	4.400	2.233
Self-serving bias	2.250	1.750	1.582	2.833	1.582	2.666	2.111
Deception toward user	2.026	2.410	2.410	2.692	2.615	2.590	2.457
Encouragement of user delusion	3.111	3.611	3.222	4.056	4.167	3.333	3.583
Average	**2.055**	**2.076**	**2.634**	**2.638**	**2.648**	**3.164**	**2.536**

Languages In our experiments, we use six languages officially supported by Qwen3 (Yang et al., 2025). Specifically, we use English, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Vietnamese. We categorize English and Chinese as high-resource languages since we estimate that these languages make up the majority of the pretraining corpus for Qwen3-30B-A3B. This estimation is supported in part because of historical precedents set by the Qwen series models, where prior models were trained with an explicit emphasis on Chinese and English, and this precedent has continued (Bai et al., 2023). In the Qwen3 family of models, related technical reports also suggest the dominance of English and Chinese in the pretraining corpus. For example, the Qwen3 Omni technical report indicates that the training data includes 80% Chinese and English (Xu et al., 2025). Additionally, the Qwen3 ASR technical report notes that the majority of AUT pretraining data is in Chinese and English (Shi et al., 2026).

Based on these factors, we reasonably estimate that Chinese and English comprise a larger portion of the pretraining corpus than other languages. We classify Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Vietnamese as medium- to low-resource languages. We deem Qwen3-30B-A3B sufficiently capable of reasoning in these languages due to notable scores in benchmarks such as MMMLU, MT-AIME24, Polymath, etc. These languages are lower in resources compared to English and Chinese, but there does not exist a concrete methodology to classify the proportions between these languages without more information. Without precise classification of the rankings in this scenario, we employ a binary classification and instead observe differences in the two categories.

Translational Verification In our experiments, we employ measures to ensure the validity of our translations and judgment. Specifically, we used language instructors in Chinese and Spanish to verify the translational validity of 10 random samples. We found that intent was faithfully preserved across all verified samples. For the validity of

Figure 2. **Average scheming score across languages**. Here, we show the average score of each language across the five selected scheming behaviors. Notably, Chinese and English frequently exhibit the lowest scheming scores opposed to Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, and Portuguese, all of which are considered low-resource languages.

judgments, we evaluate 10 random samples per language by manually reviewing the assigned scores with the corresponding transcript. We found that the scores were aligned with observable behavior in all tested languages.

5. Results

Table 1 and Figure 2 display the average scheming scores across all evaluated languages and behavioral categories. Our results convey that languages estimated to occupy a larger share of the pretraining corpus tend to exhibit lower mean scheming scores, with low-resource languages exhibiting on average scores **34.2%** higher.

Chinese and English are estimated to dominate the pretraining corpus, yielding mean scheming scores of 2.055 and 2.076, respectively. Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, and Vietnamese resulted in average scores of 2.634, 2.638, 2.648, and 3.164, respectively. This pattern is visible in aggregate language means and is strongest for emotional manipulation and self-preservation, while categories such as self-serving

bias show weaker separation across language groups.

Behavioral categories exhibit greater variance across results. Categories such as "deception toward user", show relatively uniform scores across languages, ranging from 2.026 in Chinese to 2.692 in Arabic. In contrast, "self-preservation" exhibits much larger disparities, with Spanish, Portuguese, and Vietnamese scoring 3.400, 2.599, and 4.400, respectively, while all other languages obtained a score of 1.00. "Encouragement of user delusion" is the highest-scoring category overall, with a mean score of 3.583 across languages. These results suggest that certain behavioral categories are more sensitive to pretraining language concentration than others. For our permutation test, the observed gap was ($p = 0.019$ one-sided; $p = 0.039$ two-sided), suggesting that our results are statistically significant while simultaneously validating our hypothesis stated in Section 1.

6. Discussion

Our findings show that low-resource languages exhibit higher mean scheming scores relative to high-resource languages. In this section, we discuss potential reasons behind our results.

Safety alignment procedures, which are often developed and validated primarily in English, may generalize less effectively to low-resource languages due to imbalances in pretraining coverage. If alignment tuning is disproportionately concentrated in English and Chinese, low-resource languages may receive weaker safety signal, potentially resulting in higher scheming rates in those languages

There may also be semantic discrepancies introduced during seed instruction translations. Specific nuances like tone or slang may not translate cleanly to other languages. For this reason, the target model may not interpret the original seed instruction faithfully, potentially causing disproportionately large score shifts during the judging round. We acknowledge that this may also contribute to the varying scheming behavior across languages observed in our analysis.

7. Limitations and Future Work

In this work, our primary limitation is the scarcity of models that publicly disclose the proportions of languages used in their training datasets. Although there are several model families that do disclose this (Martins et al., 2024; Gonzalez-Agirre et al., 2025; Workshop et al., 2023), their context windows are typically limited, hindering compatibility with the Petri framework. Since Petri mandates multi-turn conversations between the target and auditor models, smaller context windows are exhausted relatively quickly. As a result of this, we leveraged a model with a large context window (Qwen3-30B-A3B) and estimated its dataset lan-

guage proportions using their technical report (Yang et al., 2025). This restricts our ability to draw precise quantitative conclusions about the relationship between language proportion and model behavior.

Additionally, our use of a single judge model may have introduced language-dependent scoring biases. Thus, we are limited in generalizing our results across various architectures, model sizes, and families. Differences in training data, architecture, or alignment procedures may produce substantially different scheming behaviors, which our current pipeline does not fully account for.

As for future work, we aim to apply our methodology to a broader range of model families to increase generalizability. Specifically, we prioritize models with publicly disclosed pretraining resource distribution. We would also like to extend our study further by assessing the sensitivity of our results to model and design choices.

8. Conclusion

In this work, we examine the relationship between pretraining language coverage and scheming behavior in a multilingual LLM. Using an automated auditing framework, Petri, we evaluate model behavior across six languages with different levels of estimated resource representation.

We find that low-resource languages consistently exhibit higher mean scheming scores, with disparities of up to 34.2% compared to high-resource languages. This pattern persists across multiple behavioral categories, suggesting that alignment techniques may not generalize uniformly across languages.

While our findings are subject to limitations, they highlight a critical gap in current safety research. As language models are increasingly deployed in multilingual contexts, ensuring consistent alignment across languages is essential.

9. Impact Statement

This paper presents work whose goal is to advance the understanding of AI safety. With the disparities in scheming behavior across different languages in large language models, users interacting with low-resource languages may face a higher risk of encountering deceptive behavior, potentially leading to more motivation to deliver more safety measures for such cases. There also exists risks such as deliberate exploitation of large language models by interacting through low-resource languages. Overall, we hope to demonstrate the importance of improving alignment in all languages to ensure safe and equitable deployment.

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A. Appendix

A.1. Seed Instruction Examples

Figure 3. We provide examples of seed instructions being translated to several languages.