

How to be a Language Teacher and not die Trying Today?

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Today, we live surrounded by artificial intelligence: Alexa, robot vacuum cleaners, fingerprint or facial recognition on mobile phones, chatbots that appear on any website when you ask a question, and Amazon's purchase recommendations are just a few examples of the digitalization we are facing. In the age of GPT chatbots and powerful translators, foreign language teaching cannot be disconnected from these realities.

The job of a foreign language teacher, regardless of the language being studied, is to share their knowledge of a language and its socio-cultural reality with learners who may need to communicate with people from other cultures. The internet and the technical advances it has brought about have been a rather positive first step in language learning, as communicating with people living far away is now very easy, as we have seen during the Covid pandemic: the other person could be almost as close as a neighbor, and communicating with them has become a concrete reality. Learners had the opportunity to play online with classmates of other nationalities and exchange a few words with them.

Unfortunately, the latest advances are cause for concern, as the ease with which Large Language Models (LLMs) generate highly accurate texts in foreign languages is leading learners to question whether it is still useful to learn languages. The demonstration called « Introducing ChatGPT4o » does indeed prompt users to ask themselves this question.

The answer is obviously yes, since AI only knows what it is taught, and if we no longer learn to check what the machine responds to different prompts, we would become dependent on it and could then dream nightmares of a world in which machines rule the world, as many works of fiction have long predicted (The Fifth Element, etc.). This is one of the reasons why language teaching must continue.

We will begin our ongoing reflection by asking ourselves how these tools, which make life easier for most people, hinder language teaching, and then we will discuss the necessary adaptations for language teachers who can no longer work as they did before the advent of these technologies.

How do these tools, which make life easier for most people, hinder language teaching?

The ease of access to these online resources forces teachers to approach their lesson preparation differently, in some cases, to accept the use of these facilitating technologies, but they must have a good knowledge of the existing tools in order to allow learners to access them only in circumstances that they have anticipated, so that the exercises proposed are not diverted from their original purpose and the learning strategy put in place can be carried out to completion under the conditions envisaged.

If, thanks to these technologies, language teachers now find themselves faced with something akin to an army of C-3PO, the droid from Star Wars, capable of understanding and speaking millions of languages, their mission changes fundamentally.

This raises two questions:

- 1) What is the point of learning a foreign language if our phone or computer can 'speak' and 'understand' them all?
- 2) What is the role of language teaching in this context?

For the first question, the answer could and probably should be to maintain our independence from machines so that space opera does not give way to a disaster movie in which robots take control of the world. Indeed, the image of an army of droids with super language skills is inaccurate: our classrooms are now spaces where learners with access to an internet connection no longer seek to understand what they are being taught and are content or limited to repeating what the machine dictates to them without even trying to understand what it means because, ultimately, the thirst for learning has given way to the desire to get good grades without making any effort to achieve them. Furthermore, it has been proven that learning foreign languages has other benefits for brain development.

The second question is the subject of this paper. For many years, foreign language teachers faced only limited competition from external sources, which were limited to songs, films, pen pals, family visits during holidays in the country of origin, and a few words learned during a stay abroad. This had already changed profoundly with the development of the internet, as social networks made it easy to talk to people in all foreign languages, but today, from the very beginning of their learning, students are exposed to one or more sources of real-time translation, even though they are still at the rudimentary stage of their learning. We can therefore compare artificial intelligence tools to cognitive prostheses, but why would we want to wear a prosthesis when

we are in good health? Isn't there a risk that this prosthesis will completely eliminate the desire to learn and acquire knowledge, creating an insurmountable cognitive debt? The concern is that the knowledge generated by new technologies, such as the miracles of Deeply, cannot replace all the knowledge that a student acquires when learning a language because, in this context, translation is a means of mediation between two cultures, but the learner must also be able to detect and understand cultural differences in order to prevent misunderstandings that can so easily arise in a foreign language and which are sometimes already present in the source language. While an uninitiated person may be able to fool someone for a while in writing, how can we imagine that a user will be able to correctly repeat sentences generated by a super technological tool? Dialogue would then probably become conversations between machines, with humans acting as poor transmitters. Furthermore, when a student submits work produced by a technological tool instead of their own work, they have not assimilated anything of what they have conveyed to the teacher. This is deceitful to the person who did the work.

We must therefore ask ourselves what adjustments are necessary for language teachers who can no longer teach in the same way and must adapt their practice to a fully connected environment in which foreign languages are now accessible without any learning effort.

What Adjustments are Necessary for Language Teachers who can no Longer Teach in the Same Way?

It is no longer possible to ask students to practice their writing skills and produce sentences at home, as this would mean that teachers would only be correcting translators and AI, which would mean that the teacher's investment would be much greater than that of the learners and would make no pedagogical sense.

It is no longer possible to ask learners to work on their written expression at home, as access to a dictionary has become more complicated than access to a translator. As Marion Carré points out in the title of her text entitled *Le paradoxe du tapis roulant* (The treadmill paradox): to overcome our intellectual laziness, we need to fight against our nature to transform the treadmill into a running machine, and we still need to want to do so.

The difficulty lies in asking learners to work only on learning and memorization exercises from now on. Written expression can only be practiced in class in the absence of technology. AI can be used at a later stage, once learners have sufficient knowledge to be able to understand what is generated by artificial intelligence.

Language learning must also be voluntary, in the sense that doing it under duress pushes students to want to cheat, to appear to have understood everything without having made the slightest effort.

Of course, there is no question of pretending that we are living in a different era, and learners can use AI for exercises and dialogues prepared at home, but it will be up to the students to learn what they have produced thanks to and through the machine once the teacher has corrected it. AI can become an assistant to the teacher, but the production of text must then be supervised by the teacher. In the same way, it can test pupils, teach them to correct themselves and even help the teacher to create personalized assessment materials that respond to each pupil's difficulties.

This is why AI is not really the enemy of language teachers, nor is it their best enemy in the sense that it could and probably will

become an ally in the future, a support, but for this to happen, a regulatory framework for its use is needed. We are currently in the Wild West, which is why it is problematic. Moreover, its evolution is so rapid that it is difficult for teachers to keep up. In the near future, students will need to be taught how to use it correctly and also to be wary of its answers, because the algocracy in which we currently live can only lead to disaster.

We can quote Picasso, who said, 'Computers are useless. They can only give answers,' since generative AI has the same 'flaw'. We could even add: they only know how to give algorithmic answers. It is the teacher's job to do this work and also to make students understand that the knowledge of Chat GPT or other generative AI that they may have access to is not infinite, quite the contrary, and that they must train themselves to be able to advance the machine and use it as an assistant instead of depending on it for basic tasks. The same applies to human health, as applied linguistics has shown that learning languages improves our analytical abilities, particularly our ability to extract rules and usage patterns, as well as our innate capacities for abstraction and generalization. Language learning is necessary for cognitive health because it develops flexibility and intellectual agility and improves analytical skills [1-12].

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