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Artificial intelligence and online language courses: pros and cons

Language students approve and some linguists reject the use of artificial intelligence in language learning. Who will be right?

Among students and linguists there is no single position on the use of artificial intelligence in language courses. While the former reward the use of automated learning tools by massively acquiring apps and online language courses, the latter remain rather skeptical. Who will be right? Let's understand the pros and cons of artificial intelligence applied to language courses.

Pros of artificial intelligence applied to language courses

One of the main advantages of artificial intelligence is certainly that of helping to personalize online language courses. For those who study a foreign language it is important to have content that automatically adapts to their knowledge and interests. It is useless to insist on grammar if the main problem is the vocabulary or the pronunciation and viceversa. Another advantage of online courses is the ability to make language learning enjoyable through play. All language apps, in fact, use the game to encourage student involvement. Finally, with the use of artificial intelligence you can have immediate feedback on your answers and learn from your mistakes.

The limits of an online language course with a virtual tutor

Artificial intelligence can be used in all linguistic skills of reading, writing, comprehension and oral expression. With speech and semantic recognition, software is able to recognize grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation errors by analyzing data in real time. And this is precisely the aspect that convinces the linguists less. According to this vision, focusing on the error would not favor learning but would only create stress for the students. Another limitation of artificial intelligence is that, by definition, it can not replace human interactions with a language teacher. Think, for example, at fully automated language courses where social interactions are cancelled and only confronted with a virtual tutor or a chat.

Is it a question of artificial intelligence or teaching method?

According to other linguists the point is not the use of artificial intelligence, but the methodology used for teaching and the type of language course offered. In the world of classroom language courses, traditional methods based on grammar, translation and conversation have left space for eclectic methodologies that use a skilful mix of tools that are more suited for student. The online language apps and courses, on the other hand, use rather traditional methodologies but are innovative in terms of tools. Linguists see obsolete methodologies and instead students see the possibility of learning any language, at any time and with any device. Perhaps this is precisely why linguists and students think differently. To put everyone in agreement we should use artificial intelligence with a new method of language teaching. In this, eLearning has a lot to offer with scenario-based learning, gamification or courses in blended mode (classroom and online).

Artificial intelligence is a reality in online language courses and is highly appreciated by students because it offers personalization, play and immediate feedback. For linguists, instead, focusing on error and eliminating human contact with the teacher could hamper language learning. To find the right balance between the two positions, artificial intelligence should be applied to new teaching methodologies by making full use of the potential of eLearning.