

READING

Read the article. Complete Exercises 1 and 2 on page 7.



Artificial intelligence and language learning

As a language student, you have probably used artificial intelligence in numerous ways. You may have taken an adaptive placement test to join your class or practised your grammar with the help of an online learning platform. However, you have probably felt the limitations of relying solely on technology for feedback on your progress, particularly when it comes to the productive skills of speaking and writing. How far can a computer help you with those?

If you are studying English – or any other language – in a class with a teacher, the chances are you have been asked to give a presentation to the rest of the class. It is also likely that the presentations you have given have been followed by feedback, first from the other students and then from your teacher. Hopefully, this was a positive experience for you. However, you may have felt that the feedback was either inaccurate

or too subjective. Perhaps your classmates did not want you to feel bad, so they said you were amazing, or you did not agree with your teacher that you 'failed to engage your audience'. What if there were a computer programme that could give you a completely objective reaction to your presentation? How would it work and would you trust it?

When we give a presentation – whether in business, in class or for some other purpose – we always hope for a positive reaction from those listening to us. We want our audience to really listen, trust us, engage with us and act on what we have said in some way – maybe to change their way of thinking or to buy our product. Extensive research has helped us understand the ways in which speakers can influence an audience's reaction to them. These include the content of our talk, our body language and how we use our words and voices. Machines can now be

trained to measure these factors and give us objective feedback to help us improve our communication skills. One business coach who uses this kind of software to teach presentation skills says: 'Giving feedback with the use of technology is much less personal. You can't argue with a computer!'

Some exam boards have already started to use artificial intelligence to mark students' written work. Hundreds or even thousands of essays scored by teachers are fed into the computer, which learns to recognise the features of an essay with a particular score. Some studies have shown this to be more accurate than human marking because it eliminates human failings such as tiredness and personal preferences. However, the whole concept horrifies many working in the classroom. Teacher and writer Bill Walsh states that, 'At the very least, writing requires a breathing reader.'

The nature of artificial intelligence is that the more data you provide, the better it works. This means that as time passes and more data is added, the more we will be able to rely on it to give us feedback on our

performance. One of Walsh's objections to computers marking essays is that they will not be able to recognise humour, irony, originality of expression or the very subtle differences in meaning between two words. That may be true at present, but with enough data to work with and the right training, who knows what they might be capable of?

Although performing tasks with the use of artificial intelligence is faster, more cost effective and in many ways more accurate, there are some limitations of artificial intelligence which seem impossible to overcome. Computers are not able to empathise, they do not possess self-awareness and they are poor at multitasking. A teacher will be aware that the local football team lost an important match or that students have been delayed in a traffic jam. He or she has access to up-to-the-minute information from a range of sources – and a lifetime of experience in how to react to different situations and different personality types. Artificial intelligence can definitely help teachers, but I think they can rest assured that their jobs are safe for a few more years.

1 Which attitudes (A–F) are expressed by the writer?

- A** Presentation feedback given by humans is better than that given by computers.
- B** Professional trainers find computers useful in supporting their feedback to learners.
- C** Computers are unlikely to get better at marking essays.
- D** The drawbacks of artificial intelligence are very significant.
- E** Computers will soon be able to understand human emotions.
- F** Computers are likely to replace teachers in the near future.

2 Choose the correct option in each sentence.

- 1** Computers are more useful when you are practising receptive* / productive** skills.
- 2** Feedback from computers can be more objective / subjective than feedback from other students.
- 3** The third paragraph is generally for / against the use of artificial intelligence in presentation feedback.
- 4** According to the text, teachers like / dislike the idea of using artificial intelligence to mark essays.
- 5** Bill Walsh believes that computers will / will not be able to recognise sophisticated language.
- 6** The final paragraph emphasises the similarities / differences between teachers and computers.

*reading and listening

**writing and speaking

SPEAKING



03 You will hear eight students answering one question each. Match the speakers (1–8) to the questions they were asked (A–H).

- 1** _____
- 2** _____
- 3** _____
- 4** _____
- 5** _____
- 6** _____
- 7** _____
- 8** _____

- A** Have you ever collected anything?
- B** Is there anyone in your family who inspires you?
- C** How long have you lived in your hometown?
- D** When did you last go out with your friends?
- E** Which member of your family are you most similar to?
- F** What kind of things do you usually do with your friends?
- G** What sport or hobby would you like to try?
- H** What do you like about your hometown?