Episode #324
Artificial Intelligence & Language Learning
16th Dec, 2022

[00:00:04] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about Artificial Intelligence.

[00:00:28] At the start of December, I got access to a tool called ChatGPT, an Artificial Intelligence Chatbot.

[00:00:36] I played around with it for much of the weekend, and it is absolutely amazing.

[00:00:42] So, in this episode I am going to talk about Artificial Intelligence, and the way in which I think this technology is going to impact language learning.

[00:00:53] Long story short, I think it will provide some fantastic opportunities for language learners, and it's one of the most exciting developments in language learning history.

[00:01:04] So, I'm super excited to share my thoughts with you today.

[00:01:08] OK then, Artificial Intelligence and language learning.

[00:01:13] Now, what better way to start an episode about Artificial Intelligence and language learning than the words, literally, of a robot, an AI.

[00:01:24] I asked an AI chatbot "What impact will AI have on language learning?"

[00:01:30] I literally **typed**[1] those words, and within a couple of seconds, the response came back.

[00:01:37] AI [Artificial Intelligence] is expected to have a significant impact on language learning. AI technologies, such as natural language processing and machine learning, are already being used in language learning tools, such as language learning apps and online tutoring platforms. These tools can provide personalized and **adaptive**[2] learning experiences, by analyzing the user's language abilities and providing customized feedback and recommendations.

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[1] wrote on the computer by pressing the keys

[2] having the ability to change depending on the conditions

[00:02:02] In addition, AI can be used to create virtual language learning assistants, such as language tutors or conversation partners, who can interact with language learners in real-time and provide feedback on their language skills. These assistants can help language learners improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, and can provide a more **engaging**[3] and **interactive**[4] learning experience.

[00:02:25] Overall, the use of AI in language learning is expected to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of language learning, by providing personalized, **adaptive**, and **interactive** language learning experiences.

[00:02:39] OK, human me, it's Alastair here, I'm back.

[00:02:43] This was literally the response of a robot, this was Artificial Intelligence responding to my question.

[00:02:52] Could you tell that it was a robot? Did it sound unnatural?

[00:02:58] No, it didn't. It provided a pretty good answer, in perfect, grammatically correct English.

[00:03:05] Nice work, Robot.

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[3] attractive, interesting

[4] allowing the involvement of the user in the exchange of information

[00:03:07] If you have tried "language learning AI chatbots" in the past, they are almost always **frustrating**[5] to use, they don't understand what you are saying, and it's a significantly worse experience than speaking with a human.

[00:03:22] This one, ChatGPT, is completely different.

[00:03:27] So, what does this mean? How is this going to affect language learning, and what does it mean for you?

[00:03:35] Well, you heard the AI's response, now it's time for my human response.

[00:03:42] To **approach**[6] this question, I want to first start with a brief overview of what AI actually is, and how it has developed over the years.

[00:03:52] Then, we'll talk very briefly about how language learning has changed over time.

[00:03:58] And then we'll get to the best bit, some practical examples of how you can use this now, and how it will affect you in the future.

[00:04:08] Right, so what actually is AI, what is Artificial Intelligence?

[00:04:14] AI is the ability of a computer or machine to seem intelligent, to answer questions or do things like a human.

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[5] annoying

[6] start to deal with it

[00:04:24] Think about how you, as a human being, respond to a question. You listen, understand what you are being asked, and then you **consult**[7] the information available to you, based on your experience and knowledge, to give an answer.

[00:04:40] Perhaps this is an easy question, like: "What's your name, or is it raining?"

[00:04:45] Or maybe it's a harder one, like: "What were the reasons for the Great Depression or what **circumstances**[8] could have led to the Titanic not **sinking**[9] so quickly?"

[00:04:57] Or maybe it's an even harder one, like, "How can we reduce global warming or how can our country improve health **outcomes**[10]?"

[00:05:07] In all of these cases, to try to answer these questions, you **consult** the information available to you, analyse that information, and provide an answer.

[00:05:19] Artificial Intelligence works on a similar principle.

[00:05:23] It is a set of **algorithms**[11] that analyse a large amount of data, learn from this data, and then do things, do whatever you ask, based on that data.

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[7] turn to, refer to

[8] conditions

[9] going to the bottom of the sea

[10] results

[11] sets of mathematical rules that help computers calculate an answer

[00:05:35] Now, AI has been around for quite a long time. The idea was first explored back in 1956, but it is only in the past few years that it has really got to a point where it is able to be **reliably**[12] used to replace humans.

[00:05:53] You already use AI-powered products, even though you might not realise it.

[00:05:59] You might use something like Grammarly to help correct your English writing, that uses Artificial Intelligence to give you suggestions about your writing.

[00:06:09] If you use Google and you start typing in something and you see some suggested similar **queries**[13], that is powered by artificial intelligence.

[00:06:20] Siri, Google Assistant, Alexa, these services all make use of AI to help you do stuff.

[00:06:28] But, **no offence to**[14] Siri or Alexa, what they do is quite simple. You tell them to play a song or read you a message or tell you the capital of Iceland, and they do it.

[00:06:42] The difference between this and what is coming next, and what you can already see with ChatGPT is **seismic**[15], it's very large.

[00:06:54] So, a quick note on ChatGPT.

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[12] in a way that can be trusted

[13] inquires, questions

[14] without planning to upset them

[15] very large

[00:06:57] First, I guess I should have said this at the start, but I have no commercial relationship with ChatGPT, they aren't paying me to say this, I just think it's amazing and want to tell you about it.

[00:07:09] The second practical point is that ChatGPT is available to everyone, it's free [or at least, it was free when I used it], and the best way of experiencing what I'm talking about is by going to the website and playing with it yourself.

[00:07:26] I'll put a link in the show notes.

[00:07:29] ChatGPT is an assistant powered by AI, by Artificial Intelligence.

[00:07:36] It is a product of a company called OpenAI, a research institute founded in 2015 by Elon Musk and another **influential**[16] Silicon Valley entrepreneur called Sam Altman.

[00:07:50] OpenAI has developed a series of AI **algorithms**.

[00:07:55] There's one that can create images from text **prompts**[17], so you can say "draw a picture of Napoleon eating a banana in a **pop-art**[18] style", or "create some professional-looking headshots based on this photo of me at the beach".

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[16] having a great effect on related things, important

[17] information or messages given to a computer

[18] art based on modern popular culture

[00:08:10] It can generate music based on **inputs**[19], and it can tell you how to fix **bugs**[20] in your computer code.

[00:08:18] These are all amazing, but until recently they were not particularly accessible to anyone without the necessary technical knowledge.

[00:08:29] Then, at the very end of November, 2022, OpenAI released ChatGPT.

[00:08:37] It looks like any messaging app, you type in a command in normal English, and you will receive a response back.

[00:08:47] And the possibilities are **endless**[21]. It can write fictional stories, it can correct computer code, it can give you love advice, it can give you recipes based on **allergies**[22], it can write songs, this list could continue for years.

[00:09:04] So, instead of listing everything that this chatbot can do, we are going to focus on language learning.

[00:09:11] So, how can this help you, as a language learner, as someone learning English?

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[19] information put into the system

[20] errors in a computer program

[21] having no end, limitless

[22] conditions that make people sick after eating certain foods

[00:09:18] The first thing to say is that I think it's excellent news for language learners, and perhaps the best and most exciting development for language learners in the history of language learning.

[00:09:31] You might think that this is an **exaggeration**[23], but I really don't think it is.

[00:09:37] 100 years ago, as someone trying to learn English in, let's say Brazil or Japan or Turkey, you might never hear anyone speaking native English, even if you learned it your entire life.

[00:09:51] 50 years ago, as someone learning English, you would probably **rely on**[24] one person, your teacher. This teacher might have some textbooks, and some **tapes**[25] of native English speakers in conversation.

[00:10:06] Now, or even 10 years ago, you can watch English movies, listen to English podcasts like this one, and you can find an English teacher online at the **click**[26] of a button.

[00:10:18] Great, wonderful, you have more access to content and to native speakers than ever before.

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[23] something that makes it seem more important than it really is

[24] depend on

[25] old media for storing audio, cassettes

[26] an act of selecting an option by pressing a button

[00:10:26] But, it's still a bit **tricky**[27] to find out when you make mistakes.

[00:10:30] You need another human to help you, someone to say "Hey Francois, it's better to say "my brother's dog" than "the dog of my brother"", so someone to **point you**[28] in the right direction when you make a mistake.

[00:10:45] AI can serve this purpose.

[00:10:48] Not only can it correct you when you make a mistake, but it can explain it to you for the future, so you don't make this mistake again.

[00:10:58] And I'm not talking about some expensive product that you need to buy, or some Chrome extension that just tells you when you're going wrong, but you can do this now, for free, with ChatGPT.

[00:11:13] Now, at the moment it's a chatbot, it works via text input, you write something and it responds in writing.

[00:11:22] Clearly, this is a bit **limiting**[29], it's a bit restrictive, because you learn a language to be able to communicate **verbally**[30], speaking, not only in written form.

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[27] difficult

[28] show it to you

[29] restrictive

[30] speaking, orally

[00:11:34] But again, it's only a matter of time before you can speak to it and it will be able to respond to you in natural, spoken English, exactly like you were having a conversation with a human being.

[00:11:48] Now, I can imagine that you might be sitting there listening to me **squirming** [31], being uncomfortable, thinking "I would never do that", I want to talk to a real person, not a robot.

[00:12:01] Maybe you've seen films like Ex Machina or Her, and you thought it was **creepy**[32] and weird that anyone could form a human-like relationship with a computer.

[00:12:14] I don't blame you, I feel exactly the same way.

[00:12:18] At the moment it does feel unusual and strange, but how I think you should think about this is that it presents a wonderful opportunity.

[00:12:30] Now, I want to pause for a moment and ask you to imagine a world where you could listen to someone talking in English, at exactly the speed that you could understand, you could ask them to pause and repeat something, you could ask them questions, they could ask you questions, they would correct you if you made a mistake, they would explain that mistake to you, and you would learn from it.

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[31] being uncomfortable

[32] strange and frightening

[00:12:56] At the moment, I'm describing something that does exist already. It's the experience of speaking with someone in English, a private tutor for example, which is great, but it's not always free, it can be quite expensive, and there are **limitations**[33] to it.

[00:13:14] Now, imagine a world in which this was **accessible**[34] to anyone in the world, at any time of day, for free, and you were talking to someone with a superhuman knowledge, someone who was able to talk about everything from the Ancient Egyptians to Formula One, someone who was **endlessly**[35] **patient**[36] with you, and would correct your mistakes, someone who would never get bored or need to go to the toilet or who would get ill.

[00:13:43] Yes, this "person" might not be a person at all, it might be an AI assistant, but it is hugely **democratising**[37], it means that anyone, anywhere, can learn to speak a language; cost, time and location become **no object**[38], they are no longer factors.

[00:14:05] Now, this is perhaps a futuristic example, and one that you might not be so comfortable with.

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[33] restrictions

[34] available

[35] without end or limit

[36] able to wait or accept problems without being annoyed

[37] making it available to everyone

[38] no longer factors

[00:14:12] But there are plenty of examples of how AI can help you today, examples that I am confident that you will be very comfortable with.

[00:14:21] For example, written English.

[00:14:24] If you need to use English at work, you probably need to send emails in English.

[00:14:30] When we made our Business English course a few months ago, one of the biggest pieces of feedback we got was about emails in English.

[00:14:38] What tone should you take? How long or short should an email be? Should I write Dear Sir or should I write "Hi Jim"?

[00:14:47] And how can I check that my written English is clean and error free?

[00:14:53] The great news is that, with an AI Chatbot like this, you do not have to worry about that any more, or at least this becomes **infinitely**[39] easier.

[00:15:04] You can ask the Chatbot to write an email for you and it will do it. Tell it what you want to say, the **tone**[40] that you want it to write it in, formal, friendly etc., and **ta-da**[41], it will write it.

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[39] to a great degree, much

[40] style, general character

[41] used to call attention to something amazing

[00:15:19] This is super exciting, because it means that you can focus on more important things than the **tone** of your emails, and it **levels the playing field**[42], it means that you shouldn't be treated any differently as a non-native English speaker at work.

[00:15:36] Similarly, if you are a non-native English speaker who needs to write in English at university, let's say, you can focus more on the quality of your ideas than on the grammatical correctness of your writing.

[00:15:50] Again, this is excellent news, because it **levels the playing field**, it means that the focus is on the arguments you are making rather than the language you make them in.

[00:16:02] **The elephant in the room**[43], perhaps, is that if you start to **rely on** AI to write for you, if you are never forced to learn for yourself, then you won't learn, you won't improve.

[00:16:15] If you don't make mistakes because you ask an AI to write for you, there will be no mistakes to learn from.

[00:16:22] Clearly, this is **problematic**[44].

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[42] it creates a situation in which everyone has a fair and equal chance of succeeding

[43] the big problem that is not being talked about

[44] causing problems or difficulties

[00:16:24] It's **problematic** in written English, because you will never learn to write properly, you won't **pick up**[45] new words and phrases when writing.

[00:16:32] But it's especially **problematic** when it comes to listening and speaking.

[00:16:38] With reading and writing, you have the time to process information and **formulate**[46] a response. An AI can help you.

[00:16:47] With listening and speaking, especially when it comes to real human-conversation, which is after all the main point of language learning, you don't.

[00:16:57] You have to listen and understand, and then respond yourself, an AI can't do this for you.

[00:17:05] You might be thinking that there is a world in the future where an AI translates in real-time straight into your brain, and you can simply think about a response and this AI will automatically translate it to perfect English.

[00:17:19] But we are quite **some way off**[47] from there yet, even if that sounds like a **appealing**[48] **proposition**[49].

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[45] learn

[46] create

[47] a long distance away

[48] attractive, interesting

[49] suggestion, statement

[00:17:26] So, how can you use AI now?

[00:17:30] Well, if you are prepared to **put in**[50] the work, to learn how to learn from your mistakes and to self-correct, then there are some amazing opportunities.

[00:17:42] Use an AI to write for you, then compare what you would have said with what it suggested.

[00:17:49] But don't leave it here. If you don't understand something, ask the AI to explain it for you.

[00:17:55] Ask an AI for feedback on your work.

[00:17:59] And make sure that you combine this with activities that will help you **retain**[51], remember this knowledge - make sure that you use these corrections in your written and spoken English, so that they are being **retained**[52], they are not just **going in one ear and out of the other**[53].

[00:18:18] Ultimately, an AI can help you in a **myriad**[54] of ways, it can correct you and explain your mistakes, but it can't learn for you.

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[50] apply, dedicate

[51] remember

[52] remembered

[53] forgetting it quickly

[54] a lot

[00:18:28] It can make the journey to fluency shorter, more **accessible**, and reduce the cost, but there will always be a journey.

[00:18:37] You've probably heard me say this before, but the more you can learn to enjoy this journey, and enjoy the process of learning and creating the knowledge inside your own head, then the more satisfying not just the journey, but also the final results will be.

[00:18:57] Think about it this way.

[00:18:58] An AI assistant like ChatGPT might be able to write you a perfectly correct email or sales letter to a customer, and win the **admiration**[55] of your boss and colleagues, it might even help get you a promotion.

[00:19:13] But will you really have learned anything from it, will there be any huge inner **satisfaction**[56] that you feel?

[00:19:22] Perhaps, but it'll probably be temporary, and you won't necessarily have **internalised**[57] it.

[00:19:29] But if you treat this technology as another way to improve your own linguistic knowledge, of improving your grammar and vocabulary, and then the next

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[55] respect and approval

[56] the pleasant feeling you get when you achieve something

[57] made it part of you

time you can get there without AI, not only will that be hugely **satisfactory**[58] on an

internal level, but it'll be far more long-lasting.

[00:19:52] Ultimately, almost everyone learning a language is doing so because they

want to connect with other humans.

[00:20:00] Robots and AI can certainly help with this, to some extent, but remember, to

go all the way, you can't **rely**[59] just on artificial intelligence.

[00:20:13] OK then, that is it for today's episode on AI and language learning.

[00:20:20] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:20:24] This is actually going to be part one of a two-part **exploration**[60] of AI.

[00:20:30] Next up is going to be an episode where we will ask the question of whether

an AI can write a podcast.

[00:20:37] A quick **spoiler**[61] alert is that, yes, it can…sort of.

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[58] giving the pleasant feeling you get when you achieve something

[59] depend

[60] examination, analysis

[61] information about an important detail that is about to be revealed before its supposed time, leading to
a reduced feeling of surprise

[00:20:41] If you don't want to wait for that one, I'd **encourage**[62] you to check out the Leonardo English blog, where you can watch a video of me trying to get an AI chatbot to write a podcast episode in real time using ChatGPT.

[00:20:56] And on that note, I would certainly encourage you to check out ChatGPT. I'll put the link in the show notes, or you can just google Chat OpenAI. That really is the best way to see what this is all about, and it does feel somewhat magical.

[00:21:12] As always, I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

[00:21:16] Do you think AI is a positive thing for language learners?

[00:21:20] How can you see yourself using it?

[00:21:22] And what about society more broadly, how do you think AI will change the way we live our lives?

[00:21:30] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:21:34] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:21:42] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:21:48] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

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[62] recommend, advise

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Typed	wrote on the computer by pressing the keys
Adaptive	having the ability to change depending on the conditions
Engaging	attractive, interesting
Interactive	allowing the involvement of the user in the exchange of information
Frustrating	annoying
Approach	start to deal with it
Consult	turn to, refer to
Circumstances	conditions
Sinking	going to the bottom of the sea
Outcomes	results
Algorithms	sets of mathematical rules that help computers calculate an answer
Reliably	in a way that can be trusted

Queries	inquires, questions
No offence to	without planning to upset them
Seismic	very large
Influential	having a great effect on related things, important
Prompts	information or messages given to a computer
Pop-art	art based on modern popular culture
Inputs	information put into the system
Bugs	errors in a computer program
Endless	having no end, limitless
Allergies	conditions that make people sick after eating certain foods
Exaggeration	something that makes it seem more important than it really is
Rely on	depend on
Tapes	old media for storing audio, cassettes
Click	an act of selecting an option by pressing a button
Tricky	difficult

Point you	show it to you
Limiting	restrictive
Verbally	speaking, orally
Squirming	being uncomfortable
Creepy	strange and frightening
Limitations	restrictions
Accessible	available
Endlessly	without end or limit
Patient	able to wait or accept problems without being annoyed
Democratising	making it available to everyone
No object	no longer factors
Infinitely	to a great degree, much
Tone	style, general character
Ta-da	used to call attention to something amazing
Levels the playing field	it creates a situation in which everyone has a fair and equal chance of succeeding

The elephant in the room   the big problem that is not being talked about

Problematic   causing problems or difficulties

Pick up   learn

Formulate   create

Some way off   a long distance away

Appealing   attractive, interesting

Proposition   suggestion, statement

Put in   apply, dedicate

Retain   remember

Retained   remembered

Going in one ear and out of the other   forgetting it quickly

Myriad   a lot

Admiration   respect and approval

Satisfaction   the pleasant feeling you get when you achieve something

Internalised   made it part of you

Satisfactory   giving the pleasant feeling you get when you achieve something

Rely   depend

Exploration   examination, analysis

Spoiler   information about an important detail that is about to be revealed

before its supposed time, leading to a reduced feeling of surprise

Encourage   recommend, advise

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com