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LANGUAGES, CULTURES, AND COMMUNICATION: THE FUTURE OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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LANGUAGES, CULTURES, AND COMMUNICATION: THE FUTURE OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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LANGUAGES, CULTURES, AND COMMUNICATION: THE FUTURE OF THE
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REVOLUTIONIZING LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, CALL AND AI LEARNING APPS IN THE EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

The 21st century is marked by rapid technological advances, which have had an impact on all spheres of life, including education. As it is now impossible to imagine life without all the technological devices we have at our disposal, it is impossible to imagine the modern classroom without them, as well. Certainly, not incorporating all technology has to offer would be somewhat counter-productive, as the advantages are evident in terms of increasing learner motivation, making classes more fun, allowing for faster communication between teachers and learners, among others. However, teachers need to strike a careful balance between innovation and preservation as they reevaluate conventional language teaching paradigms in light of incorporating different CALL

frameworks and digital technologies in the classroom, as well as numerous AI learning apps as efficient tools in enhancing EFL acquisition. This paper addresses these issues, the various aspects that may have an adverse effect not just in the sphere of education but in life, and compares two AI apps - Duolingo and TalkPal - in EFL learning.

Keywords: computer-assisted language learning (CALL), digital technologies, communication, language learning environment, technological dependence

INTRODUCTION

It is an undisputable fact that in the last several decades numerous changes and advancements have marked all spheres in life, not excluding that of education. In order to keep up with all these changes that have been brought about, it is imperative that people are proficient in two particular areas - namely, in knowing foreign languages and in computers. Nowadays computers have been implemented, to an extent, in many classrooms; however, they may not have been utilized in the best way possible, with the result being that they have been abused more than they have been used (Wang, 2009; Garrett, 2009). As society is becoming increasingly digitalized, this issue will become even more evident. As such, it will diminish the effectiveness of the workforce by producing more people who are not able to adapt to the new demands of the market and who cannot properly use the new technology.

One of the branches mainly affected by this is the educational system, specifically FL learning, and in our context, EFL. It is vital that we identify the factors that lead (E)FL learners to become dependent on CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) and how this dependence is ultimately impacting both their autonomy and the acquisition of their language skills. Though research has been carried out focusing on CALL not just in the EFL context, but other languages, as well, such as Dutch (Last & King, 1979) and Russian (Marzban, 2011), there is obviously the need for further studies that will provide more in-depth analyses of how things are developing.

In any case, it is a fact that CALL and the implementation of computers in education has led to learners becoming technologically-dependent, resulting in a decreased and ever-decreasing attention span. Furthermore, there are also instances of a decrease in language proficiency in some areas, as well as a decrease in their overall independence in carrying out various tasks and assignments.

The 1970s saw the implementation of computers into the classrooms of most primary and secondary schools throughout the U.S., which resulted in the rising call for CALL curricula. The next several years were marked by an insufficient number of CALL programs being developed, despite Wray (1983) noting the rapid development of computer-assisted learning in these types of schools, as there were simply not enough schools with access to computers and not enough software to use these computers to be able to evaluate ideas on any but the smallest of scales (Wray, 1986). Thus, in this period, until 1986, teachers were left with few options on how to implement computers into their classrooms.

GENERAL REVIEW OF CALL

Chapelle (1989), Brown and Jahn (1990), Bull et al. (1995), Wang & Heferman (2009), Marzban (2011), and Lee et al. (2011) have all written about the role of CALL in the context of language education, which all merit a greater look. In Bull's research, for example, the team developed the "Mr. Collins" platform, which provided the students with personalized materials, and a plan that would take into consideration their L1 and background languages that might affect their learning process. This was done in order to help the students with potential L1 interference errors. The idea Bull et al. expounded was that "due to his own contributions, the student is less likely to regard the model with suspicion. Because the student model is the focus of the system, it must contain more information than is typically found in learner models." (Bull et al., 1995, p. 4). However, though good in theory, in practice the program underwent constant malfunctions and, in fact, made it much more difficult for the students to acquire English. Some of the mistakes the students acquired through the program even became fossilized (Bull et al., 1995), which made it much harder to correct than to have taught from scratch, ultimately resulting in a counter-effective influence.

Wang, another researcher, also discovered issues with CALL, in his 2009 study conducted on a group of Japanese high school students. He wanted to see whether there was a possibility of students' data leaking through the platforms which were used in school and the students' opinions concerning this. His research noted that the students trusted their teachers and the curriculum implicitly, frequently without challenging the facts or teaching strategies that were being taught to them, and concluded that computer platforms did indeed collect students' data for third-party applications. As such, there was a security concern of a data breach in that private information might be stolen. Despite their best intentions, the teachers lacked the skills required to put into practice sensible measures to protect the students' privacy, and this weakness raised questions about the general effectiveness and security of the educational programs, in addition to the risk of making their private information public. Thus, students' trust in the educational system was eroded as their future opportunities became jeopardized by potential identity theft and other forms of data misuse due to the lack of strong privacy measures. The incident brought to the forefront the importance of educators receiving training and resources to safeguard the privacy of their students and improve the effectiveness of the programs.

The above is just one perspective of the issue, as there is other research that offers a different, and differing, view. Chapelle's research, for example, illustrated that CALL can have a beneficial influence when used appropriately, and her study introduced a new approach to promoting language learning and improving writing skills. CALL programs were created to meet the various needs of the students and provide invaluable assistance in the various stages of the writing process, such as prewriting, drafting, and revising. In addition, due to their versatility, they were especially useful to people learning a second language, as they not only helped to improve linguistic proficiency, but communication skills as well. Thus, in this case, the widespread use of CALL in educational settings is called for due to its ability to offer personalized and customized support catering to students' unique needs and, thus, enabling them to become more proficient and self-assured communicators. However, bearing in mind the nature of CALL, Chapelle notes that "because CALL practice draws on cross-disciplinary work, CALL researchers and developers find themselves at the crossroads among disciplines that appear to offer insights for work in CALL" (Chapelle, 1997, p. 22)

In addition to resulting in improved proficiency, CALL programs are also essential resources in helping learners acquire semantic and morphological abilities outside of the regular classroom environment (Brown and Jahn, 1990). One of the primary benefits of CALL is its capacity to simplify the learning process, allowing learners to complete various time-consuming and complex assignments outside of regular classroom hours. Furthermore, CALL is not only used for improving productive skills, but also for improving learners' reading comprehension skills, as Marzban (2011) notes. In fact, his study used an experimental design including a pre-test and post-test, with 30 participants selected, at random, as the treatment group, and the remaining 30 participants constituting the control group. Both groups received reading comprehension instructions from the same instructor utilizing CALL, with the second group receiving instructions using more conventional methods. The study's findings indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups' reading comprehension scores at the level of $P < 0.05$, leading to the conclusion that using computer-assisted instructional strategies does help learners become better readers.

According to the study, CALL is most beneficial for teaching and learning languages when it is directed toward certain goals and has a strong justification for its application based on a large body of knowledge of professional development, pedagogy, and ICT. A number of other studies have also concluded that computers are not harmful in language acquisition, such as Lee's study in 2011 in which he tested a software developed to make realistic grammar errors simulated by computers. The results of the testing on a group of students were positive and showed an increase in their precision by 6% and recall by 8.3%. This method increased their score in two separate instances, and in one instance it showed a possible grammar error reduction by 59%.

GENERAL REVIEW OF DUOLINGO AND TALKPAL

Duolingo is a language learning app which first launched on June 19, 2012. It was initially a human-led app, as the design, questions and lessons were all written by content writers and translators. However, as the app gained more and more traction and rose to popularity, it slowly went from a human-led app to a machine-led app, also known as Artificial Intelligence (AI). The reasoning behind this transition was that AI was simply faster and more efficient at creating content and providing translations for lessons. This transition, however, meant that 10% of Duolingo's translators became redundant, raising a potential ethical concern for using this application as a language learning source.

Despite that concern, however, the fact that the application is free has made it appealing to many, with a Civic Science survey conducted in 2023 showing that while 24% of people use Duolingo "out of curiosity/desire to learn", 23% use it in the hopes of becoming "fully fluent in another language" (Goodwin, 2023, p. 2). Unfortunately, a number of studies have shown that while Duolingo is successful in introducing certain aspects of a language, it is not enough on its own to master one, too.

In regards to its layout, Duolingo takes the form of a game so as to make language learning more fun and interesting. The app's layout is in the form of a tree, and the further the learner scrolls down, the more lessons branch out (Lau, 2020). Each lesson has five practice challenges and once

they are finished, the learner may proceed to the next lesson. In its latest update, Duolingo also allows learners to advance forward to different lessons if they feel prepared to do so, however, they may only do this if they have made fewer than three mistakes in the first test. This is to make sure that they are truly ready to advance to the next lesson/level.

TalkPal, on the other hand, is an AI-powered app that launched as recently as 2023. As stated on their official page, its aim is to become the number one AI language tutoring service for “context-driven conversations and adaptive learning technology” (TalkPal: About). Unlike Duolingo, which initially started out as a human-powered application, TalkPal has always been an AI-powered service.

Comparing the two apps, we may note that while Duolingo offers introductory language courses, TalkPal offers a more intermediate experience, despite having three modes of difficulty: beginner, intermediate and high. This is because the app’s main aim is to improve learners’ communicative, listening and writing skills in their L2 through total language immersion (TalkPal: AI Language Teacher). Regardless of its beginner mode, the app requires a learner to have at least some form of initial knowledge of the foreign language before they begin using the TalkPal services. In terms of layout and the type of language practice, TalkPal offers seven different forms/options for enhancing learners’ speaking proficiency. The first is a “Chat” option, where the learner may pick a topic to talk about, or allow the AI to choose a topic for them, which they will then chat about and discuss. The second communication option available is called the “Sentence” option, where the learner is able to practice their pronunciation by repeating phrases after the AI bot. The said phrases are also translated in the learner’s native language. The next option is a “Role-play” option, which is similar to the chatting option, the only difference being that the learner has options of role-play settings to choose from, such as “Ordering a Taxi”, “Booking a Hotel”, “At the Supermarket”, “Date Night”, among others. The following mode is also similar to the “Role-play”, as the learner may message a character of the options given in the “Characters” mode. The second to last option is “Debates”, where the learner may choose from any of the offered debate topics to discuss with the AI bot in a chat, such as “impact of social media”, “necessity of education”, “animal testing”, “free education”, and “violence in video games”, among others. The final mode is the “Picture Mode”, where the learner is given a picture they need to describe as accurately as possible, using, for example, colors to describe the scene, objects they see, feelings and moods they may recognize, and so forth.

TEACHING APPROACHES IN DUOLINGO

Enamul Hoque (2016) defines teaching approaches as “a set of principles, beliefs, or ideas about the nature of learning, which is translated into the classroom” (p. 23). A number of different approaches may be employed in (E)FL, all based on different beliefs on what learning is, and how learning should look like, as well as other factors, such as learners’ age, proficiency level, aims, class size, and so on. The approaches used in Duolingo and TalkPal are the Eclectic Approach and the Communicative Approach.

The Eclectic Approach, as the name suggests, is a teaching approach which incorporates multiple different types of methodologies and techniques to ensure that learners get the most out of their

language learning experience (TeachingEnglish: Eclectic Approach). It often goes hand in hand with the Communicative Approach, which places an emphasis on communication as a way to help learners build their communicative and linguistic competence. In general, the Communicative Approach has found nothing but praise, with the only criticism it receives being that it depends too much on games and activities to foster successful communication among students (Turner, 2021).

Duolingo follows an Eclectic Approach to teaching, but it also attempts to incorporate the Communicative Approach, as seen through certain exercises/tasks. It seems to try to help learners recognize when and how to say what to whom, which is the aim of the Communicative Approach. Thus, in Duolingo we may come across the following exercises:

- *Scrambled sentences*: the aim is to test the learners' syntactic knowledge of the language, i.e. knowledge of sentence elements and sentence structure. The scrambled sentences are also more often than not accompanied by speech. This is to ensure that the learner is constantly exposed to the sound of the new language they are acquiring. The exercise can be carried out in one of two ways:

1) the learners need to put the words in the order in which they hear them. This exercise is accompanied by speech, where the learner listens to the sentence and then taps on the suitable words to order them in the correct way. This is more so to train their ear than to practice their syntactic knowledge. However, it does offer syntax training to an extent, as it trains them to get acquainted with the English sentence structure through the constant repetition of the same sentences within a given exercise/challenge; and

2) the learners need to put the words in the correct order. This exercise is not accompanied by speech, but most of the time the sentences which learners are asked to order are sentences they have already heard being repeated many times. As such, this makes the exercise somewhat of an extension to the previous exercise, accompanied by speech. The aim of this exercise is to provide learners an opportunity to retrieve their prior knowledge of the sentence structure which they have been exposed to repeatedly throughout their learning.

- *Role-plays*: this task occurs in both the beginner and intermediate levels, and the main objective is to test the learners' knowledge by prompting them to read into the conversation's context and apply their knowledge directly in order to solve the task. The learner is given a sentence, and afterwards is presented with two possible options for the answer, where they need to select the most appropriate response, such as in the example below:

example 1. A: "Can you help me? I can't find the bus station."
B: op1. "Just walk a little farther, you can't miss it."
B: op2. "Walk for an hour daily, and you'll feel better."

- *Questions and answers*: as previously with the role-plays, the learners here are given a sentence and are then presented with two possible options for the answer, with the aim being to test their vocabulary knowledge, such as in the example below:

example 2. "Planes take off and leave one airport. A few hours later, they land at another airport." What does "land" mean?

- a) For an actor to get famous,
- b) For a plane to arrive, or
- c) For a car to leave?

- *Gap-fill exercises*: this type of exercise occurs in the intermediate level course and the idea behind it is to introduce new words while also testing the learners' knowledge on previous words, such as in the example below:

example 3. My suitcase is much _____ than my backpack.
 sweeter smaller funnier heavier

- *Speaking/Repeating*: the aim here is to train the learners' phonetic ear, as well as their pronunciation.

- *Listening-Dictation*: as similar to the Speaking/Repeating above, the aim in this case is, again, to train the learners' phonetic ear, with a view of their writing skills, too. In the dictation part, for example, the learners are asked to write the sentence they hear, and they will then be assessed on sentence structure, as well as on their use of vocabulary and spelling. The listening part has its own segment, separate from the dictation, as there is an exercise where the learners listen to the bot pronounce one word out of a minimal pair and they then have to select the word they heard.

Duolingo uses different types of exercises to simulate a Communicative Approach to EFL learning, and it somewhat succeeds at doing so. The whole premise and layout of the app is to make learning feel and look like a game, and the terms and phrases that are taught are phrases and vocabulary that one may encounter in everyday settings and situations, which is an aim of the Communicative Approach. However, the way the exercises are laid out does not really prompt learners to improve their communication skills and they cannot reach their fullest communicative potential due to the app's overuse of the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual method. In fact, the overuse of these two methods is seen as a reason for the overall lack of fluency which users report to have, even after studying a language on Duolingo for so long.

TEACHING APPROACHES IN TALKPAL

In terms of the teaching approaches and methods used in TalkPal, as well as potential issues, advantages and/or disadvantages regarding their use, an interview was conducted on the app itself, as presented below.

Q1. Which teaching approaches would you say you use the most in your English Language Teaching?

TP. At TalkPal, we use the communicative approach to teaching English, focusing on real life situations and meaningful conversations. We believe in providing interactive activities and opportunities for students to practice speaking and listening skills.

Q2. Would you say that TalkPal uses these approaches in the correct way? Would you say the way in which you use these approaches offers authentic experiences?

TP. Absolutely. At TalkPal we strive to provide an effective learning experience by incorporating the communicative approach in our teaching methods. Our platform offers a variety of activities and resources that allow students to practice and improve their language skills in a realistic and engaging way.

Q3. Could you give a few examples of the types of exercises that you do to support this approach to teaching?

TP. Certainly. As part of our communicative approach, we offer exercises such as role-plays, discussions on current topics and interactive games that encourage students to actively use the language.

Q4. Is it fair to say that a complete beginner in a specific language can use this app with no issues and no difficulty?

TP. Absolutely. Our platform is designed to cater to learners of all levels, including complete beginners. We provide beginner-friendly materials, interactive exercises and a supportive learning environment to help users start learning a new language with ease.

Q5. Do you think it's unfair/dishonest to say you're offering a complete beginners course in English when there are no segments that teach students vocabulary, grammar, or sentence structure? You simply push students into communication. Can you elaborate on this aspect please?

TP. You're right, our approach focuses more on communicative practice, rather than traditional vocabulary or grammar lessons. However, we do provide vocabulary and grammar support throughout the conversation activities.

Q6. Let's talk about error correction. Beginner learners still don't know the complete nuances of a language, therefore they can't truly navigate around why you are correcting them. Also, often there are mistakes in the corrections themselves. What do you have to say about error correction in this regard?

TP. I understand your concern regarding error correction and the importance of allowing students to express themselves freely. It is essential to find a balance between providing feedback for improvement and fostering a supportive environment that encourages individuality and self-expression. TalkPal continually works on refining its error correction approach to ensure that it is beneficial and tailored to each learner's needs.

Q7. So for now, is it fair to say that you don't fully follow the communicative approach method because you don't necessarily offer the nuances and the free space that, for example, a teacher may offer at a school setting because of your setbacks as AI?

TP. As an AI language learning platform, TalkPal aims to incorporate elements of the communicative approach by providing learners with opportunities to practice their communication

skills in a supportive environment. However, I understand that there may be limitations in replicating the nuances and individual approach that a human teacher at a school setting can offer. TalkPal constantly strives to improve and adapt its methods to meet the needs of its learners.

TalkPal differs from Duolingo in that it assumes its users have at least some knowledge of the language they are aiming to study, regardless of their level. Although the app has beginner, intermediate and advanced English modes, it does not offer special treatments, nor does it discriminate between beginner versus higher levels of English speakers. Furthermore, the app does not teach grammar or vocabulary in a straightforward, traditional manner, but rather aims to perfect the learners' knowledge through communication, both written and spoken.

Unlike Duolingo, TalkPal's method of teaching stays true to the Communicative Approach, as it follows through on its aims to provide learners the space to express themselves and learn a language at the same time. It also has multiple modes which teach learners when and how they should speak to certain people in certain situations. This, in turn, helps learners understand nuance and contextualizes the language for them as well. However, as seen in the brief interview above, the app is far from perfect in the way in which it facilitates this method, especially when it comes to its use of error correction.

TEACHING METHODS IN DUOLINGO

Methodologies can be seen as a practical realization or application of the teaching approaches, as they are essentially the procedures taken to realize the aim of a given approach. They represent a 'systematic' and 'procedural' way of doing or realizing certain principles or beliefs associated with a specific approach (Teaching Approaches, Methods and Techniques, 2016).

Grammar-Translation Method

As mentioned previously, Duolingo tries to use the Communicative Approach in its teaching as shown in the variety of task examples noted earlier; however, the way in which it facilitates these exercises is much more reminiscent of the Grammar-Translation Method. In the beginner English course, for example, the learners are not as immersed into the language as they would be had Duolingo followed the Communicative Approach. Instead, when learning new words, the learners are given the word's equivalent in their native language (i.e. a translation), encroaching on the approach it intends to show and follow. There are other ways in which the app displays its adherence to the Grammar-Translation Method, such as:

- *Memorization*: in the beginner and intermediate English courses, the learners are presented with an English word and then given multiple translations to choose from, one of which is the correct equivalent in their native language. In addition, the learners are often presented with pictures corresponding to the vocabulary taught. This is, undoubtedly, a great aid to visual learners, as it helps them associate the word they are learning with a visual/photographic equivalent, as well as their native language equivalent.

- *Antonyms and Synonyms*: in both the intermediate and the beginner courses, the learner is given the option to click on any word that they are shown on the screen, and once they do so, they are

given synonyms and/or antonyms for the said word. The drawback in this situation is that the synonyms and antonyms given in the beginner course are translations of English, rather than English equivalents. This is, of course, not a good thing because it does not leave room for vocabulary expansion through language immersion, which is the aim of the Communicative Approach. It does not allow the learners to expand their FL knowledge through their own curiosity. In the intermediate course, however, the synonyms, as well as the instructions for each exercise, are given only in English, with no mention of translation.

- *Translating sentences (written and spoken)*: in the beginner course, the learners are given a sentence and asked to translate the sentence from English into their native language, and vice versa. The purpose of this task is to see how well they can translate a sentence on a vocabulary level, as well as on a grammatical (sentence structure) level from their native language into English and vice versa.

- *Gap fill exercises*: these exercises are found both in the intermediate and the beginners courses. The learners need to put the correct word where it is meant to go, based on a picture, or based on the context, the former being more prevalent in the beginner course and the latter in the intermediate course).

Audio-Lingual Method

Duolingo can be said to revitalize this method of learning, as it pairs it with the Communicative Approach in that it turns it into a game rather than a serious habit formation activity. The way in which Duolingo is laid out with the multiple types of exercises, whether speaking, reading, writing, matching, listening, among others, the learners do not actively participate in the act of memorizing, rather it becomes a subconscious process since the memorizing of drills, phrases and vocabulary is conducted as a game. In this way, Duolingo's twist on this method may actually make it more effective than simply drilling information into the learners' head. Thus, the following tasks are found, as presented below:

- *Substitution drills*: these drills include the substitution of one or two words of a phrase and in a classroom setting, they are usually done as a speaking task between two students, or between a student and a teacher. Duolingo's twist on this drill is that it often has one form of a question asked first, and then the next question will have the same sentence but phrased or used differently, as shown in the example below:

example 4. Q1. (Gap-fill exercise) "It's very easy to _____ public transportation."

Q2. (Role-play exercise with the same phrase in a different context)

A: "Is it easy to use public transportation?"

B1: Oh yes, there are lots of buses and trams.

B2: Yes I have, I've been to every museum here.

These two exercises have the same phrase but are set in different contexts, which makes this a more interesting and interactive exercise than regular substitution drills.

- *Transformation drills*: these drills involve the changing of the sentence in some way, whether from a declarative to an interrogative form, from active to passive, and so forth. The previous example can be used as an example of a transformation drill, since the first sentence is a statement (“It’s very easy to use public transportation.”), while the second is a question (“Is it easy to use public transportation?”).

- *Repetition*: something else which Duolingo has is simple listen-and-repeat exercises, which aim to train the learners’ phonetic ear, as well as their pronunciation. The learners first listen to the bot utter a simple phrase/sentence, and then they are asked to repeat it to the best of their abilities. They are graded on their pronunciation, whether or not they leave out a certain word and on how well they keep to the sentence structure, but are not graded on fluency.

Overall, most of the exercises which both the intermediate and the beginner courses offer have a lot of repetition. Each lesson has certain vocabulary that needs to be covered, as well as possible grammar structures. Therefore, in general, there is much repetition of sentences and phrases, as well as the substitution and transformation of those phrases, throughout the tasks of these courses. The advantage here is that the repetitions are done in a fun, engaging and competitive way. However, despite the fun learners may derive from their experience with Duolingo, the same cannot be said for the development of their fluency. This is because there is a level of redundancy to some of the exercises, and this is a setback which is very commonly associated with the Audio-Lingual Method. The redundancy comes from the fact that the layout and constant repetition of phrases and vocabulary, paired with audio and visual aids, takes the attention away from understanding the grammar and/or the sentence structure, instead placing an emphasis on drilling and remembering the phrases heard.

TEACHING METHODS IN TALKPAL

Like Duolingo, TalkPal also makes use both Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method, and we shall see how it fares on both counts, as compared to Duolingo.

Grammar-Translation Method

Unlike Duolingo, which uses the Grammar-Translation Method explicitly, TalkPal offers its learners the option to translate the chat sentences in their own language, but only if they wish to do so. This means that the conversations are in English, as the Communicative Approach supports, however, should the learners encounter words they may not know, the app offers the option of checking their translation equivalents, which the AI writes or says. Additionally, if the learners are unsure of which response they should give, they are offered two options: either click on the “Suggest answer” button, or they respond in their native language to the question, to which the AI may reply in English. This allows for an indirect way of learning the language by analyzing the written text and translating it for themselves. This is illustrated in the example below:

example 5.

AI question: What scares you the most about the future of work with automation and artificial intelligence?

Your message: ne znam

Corrected message: I don't know.

Explanation: The abbreviation "don't" is used to express negation in the present tense.

AI question: What don't you know or understand about the future of work with automation and artificial intelligence?

Audio-Lingual Method

As stated previously, TalkPal, unlike Duolingo, does manage to follow through on its use of the Communicative Approach to ELT, with its wide selection of modes such as "Chat mode", "Role-play mode", "Call mode", and so forth. However, there is one segment within TalkPal which is reminiscent of the Audio-Lingual Method and that is its "Sentence mode". Here the learners are allowed to practice speaking and get percentile feedback based on their *accuracy score*, which tests whether the learners have accurately produced the sentence they heard in regards to their intonation and sentence structure; *fluency score*, which tests how fluently the learners have produced the sentence; and *completeness score*, which tests whether or not the learners have left out any information, sentence parts, or words in their sentence production. Although this system of assessing speech is accurate, it is noteworthy to mention that this mode does not differentiate among beginner, intermediate or advanced English. This means that the sentences are the same for all learners, regardless of which topics they may choose. This can, of course, lead to frustration among learners of all levels, as the sentences may seem too advanced for beginners and too easy for advanced/intermediate learners.

ERROR CORRECTION

When it comes to forming a true assessment in terms of how successful a language learning system is, the number one concern is always the development of learners' language skills, which include receptive skills, such as listening and reading, and productive skills, such as speaking and writing. This is why it is so important to look at the segment of the error correction methods used within these language learning apps, as error correction plays a crucial role in learners' commitment to learning a language. Although the error correction segment may be frequently overlooked when it comes to assessment, it is vital as it extends much further than simply getting the learners on the right track, vocabulary-, grammar-, syntactic-, or otherwise. In fact, it has been found to play a key role in learners' willingness to commit to their studies, as well as in creating a positive self-image, which ties in to higher motivation and engagement. (TeachingEnglish: Error Correction). Learners' willingness and curiosity are perhaps the most vital parts of any learning experience, as these two things are the driving forces behind their pursuit of knowledge (TeachingEnglish: Error Correction).

Error Correction in Duolingo

Duolingo has an interesting way of encouraging learners to continue learning and actively pursue their language studies. Due to the fact that its layout is in the form of a game, the app has a heart system in order, similar to games with heart systems, which represent the health, or life spans of

characters in combat. The hearts in Duolingo represent the number of mistakes that a learner is allowed to make before they are put in time out due to losing all of their hearts. Of course, this time out can be avoided if the learner pays for extra hearts, or simply avoids making mistakes.

To add to the competitive aspect, the app has daily quests that a learner may complete for extra life points, or hearts, as well as a League Competition system in place. The league competition is a real life competition between all real life learners who use Duolingo to learn the same language. The learners with the most XP and heart points rank the highest, and if they manage to remain at the highest ranks (Gold, Silver or Bronze) by the end of the week, they are awarded with a gold medal, XP/hearts and other additional exchange gifts.

In terms of how effective all this is in motivating learners, obviously a lot more needs to be taken into consideration before any valid conclusions can be made. There are a number of learners, for example, that have taken to public online forums such as Reddit to complain that despite being on Duolingo for a long time, have not yet managed to achieve the fluency they had expected. There are many unknown factors in their complaints, however, so this ought to be taken with a grain of salt. Regardless of this, however, the fun and engagement that Duolingo offers seems to lure learners right back in. This, of course, is not a negative thing, as people are finding ways to enjoy language learning.

Error Correction in TalkPal

TalkPal begins to falter as a language learning app when it comes to its error correction system. Although it offers translations of sentences that learners may be unfamiliar with, the app does not provide feedback/error correction in the learners' native language. All feedback is given in English, which may present a problem for those who are not fully familiar with the language.

Thus, for example, we may have the following situation:

example 6.

AI message: What specifically do you dislike about the future of work in a world influenced by automation and artificial intelligence?

Your message: i not like that scary

Corrected message: I don't like that scary.

Explanation: 'I' should be capitalized. 'Don't' is the correct contraction of 'do not' to indicate negation.

When analyzing this response, one may quickly realize that AI generally lacks in offering the correct feedback regarding the mistakes learners make. The correct sentence should, of course be, "I do not/don't like that it is/it's scary", as opposed to "I don't like that scary". However, the conversation continues in spite of this, uninterrupted by the error correction, proving that AI remains true to the Communicative Approach, valuing communication over syntactic accuracy.

We previously noted the TalkPal option of replying in the mother tongue, and while this is positive, AI has been found to sometimes translate learners' sentences incorrectly, as in the following example:

example 7.

AI message: What don't you know or understand about the future of work with automation and artificial intelligence?

Your message: pa ne znam, se plasham deka kje ni go prezemat nachinot na spechaluvanje

Corrected message: I don't know, I'm afraid that they will take our way of celebrating.

Explanation: 'don't' is the correct contraction of 'do not'. 'Plasham' should be 'afraid'. 'Deka' should be 'that'. 'Kje' should be 'will'. 'Ni' should be 'our'. 'Go prezemat' should be 'take'. 'Nachinot' should be 'way'.

This issue with proper translation is due to the fact that this application is purely AI-controlled, which means that it does not register nuance in language in the way a human translator might. The way this app translates sentences is very reminiscent of Google Translate, and although it is not specifically stated, it seems as though it uses a similar translation service to that of Google. This is ultimately what makes the translations non-credible. Although this app may still prove useful to intermediate or higher level English speakers, it is difficult to say the same for beginner English speakers.

CONCLUSION

The digital age has brought about a number of technological changes that are here to stay. It is up to us, as educators, to make the most of all these advancements in helping learners achieve maximum results and meet their aims and objectives. The advantages that CALL bring to the field of education are significant and cannot be ignored. In fact, far from being a hindrance, CALL has turned out to be a revolutionary force that has fundamentally transformed language learning, helping learners improve their language skills across the board. The fact that it provides individualized support, carefully tailored to each learner's particular needs and style of learning has made it a force to be reckoned with. It would be counter-productive not to take advantage of this, and teachers can achieve excellent pedagogical outcomes by strategically implementing CALL within their educational frameworks, as incorporating CALL not only improves conventional teaching techniques but it also fosters creative learning strategies, leading to an interactive and dynamic learning environment, thus boosting learner motivation and engagement. Learners can only inevitably benefit from this link between technology and instruction by becoming more verbally proficient, by improving their writing skills, and honing their critical thinking. Thus, rather than approaching CALL with concern, educators perhaps ought to embrace its transformational potential as a catalyst for positive change in education, a necessary step in reaching the full potential of educational initiatives in the 21st century and beyond.

In addition, language learning apps inevitably offer certain advantages in developing learners' competences and skills, though there are also drawbacks that need to be taken into consideration, as with anything AI-related.

Duolingo, for example, has interesting ways of engaging its learners and motivating them through making error correction and language learning more of a game than a serious activity. However, the lack of seriousness, paired with the type of tasks and exercises it offers, it is clear why there

are so many complaints against it, especially in the area of fluency. Yet, this should not be a great surprise as Duolingo does not aim to improve learners' fluency, since the tasks it offers are focused on developing learners' phonetic ear, as well as getting them to understand grammar rules implicitly through repetition and exercises that support this. On one hand, Duolingo can help improve learners' lexical knowledge, as it introduces learners to grammar, vocabulary and syntax in both an implicit and explicit way. On the other hand, however, it does not offer much improvement in segments such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. Though it is a good way to get introduced to a foreign language and its basics, using it as the only means to learn, and study a language is pointless.

TalkPal is much more efficient in getting learners to start actively listening, using and participating in communication. Although the app is not meant for complete beginners, as it gives no solid foundation for knowledge to be gained, it is a relatively solid way of language learning/practicing for intermediate and higher level English learners. The app has its own way of making learning fun and can help learners improve their listening, reading and writing skills much better than the surface level knowledge that Duolingo offers. This is due to the active use of the Communicative Approach in all its segments - speaking, writing, reading and listening. However, the app does not come without its own set of drawbacks. The error correction system has proven to be inaccurate on many occasions, and it has also been proven to be quite stifling to learners' self-expression. This is because TalkPal, at the end of the day, is a machine-led app and thus it cannot fully understand language nuances, let alone teach them. As a result, learners do not have a solid base to work off of when it comes to the expansion of their linguistic understanding, especially in the context of culture, pragmatics and so forth.

In conclusion, we may draw special attention to a segment from the interview with TalkPal when it says that, in general, the system has "limitations in replicating the nuances and individual approach that a human teacher at a school setting can offer." This is a succinct summary of the fact that though both apps, Duolingo and TalkPal, offer interesting ways of introducing or immersing a learner into a new language, the experience of learning with another human being is something that cannot be replicated on many different levels.

On the other hand, however, we must not underestimate the benefits offered by various technological advancements that can be incorporated in the area of education, and specifically in EFL and ESL teaching and learning, such as CALL and other AI-driven and -powered innovations, which will undoubtedly become even more advanced in the future.

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