Chapter 3
The Reality of Artificiality:
The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Language and Culture Course Assessments and Rubrics

Teresa Lobalsamo

https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6807-4862

University of Toronto Mississauga, Canada

Dellannia Segreti

https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7320-9808

University of Toronto Mississauga, Canada

Mohammad J. Jamali

University of Toronto, Canada

Sylvia Gaspari

University of Toronto, Canada

ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to increase its presence and accessibility within education, the need to address AI's impact on assignment design and the production of original coursework is heightened. Within the context of an undergraduate language and culture course, this chapter thus offers reflections on the integration of AI tools and their effect on shaping assessment methods. The authors also highlight that there indeed remains a great need for continued research in the realm of AI and education going forward, especially where enhanced AI-detection technologies, institutional policies, academic rigour, and learner expressiveness are concerned.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been in steady development in information technology and other industry sectors for several decades. However, recent developments in Generative AI and the unprecedented accessibility of tools such as ChatGPT have heightened the need for critical discussion on AI and the ways in which they will inevitably affect the education sector. In an effort to contribute to this evolving discussion, this chapter reflects on the recent implementation of Generative AI on methods of assessments assigned and completed for an undergraduate Italian Language and Culture course (University of Toronto Mississauga). The course is structured around 12 thematic units; weekly to bi-weekly assessments chart learning progress through formative pieces of work related to each [unit]. For students who undertake the course to fulfill an Italian language requirement as part of their program of study, select assignments are completed in Italian. By outlining how generative AI tools were integrated within the context of Italian Language and Culture, we will consider how modifications made to the course's syllabus, assessments, and rubrics reveal new opportunities and potential pitfalls that instructors will want to consider--and quickly--so that course delivery, academic rigour and integrity can remain impactful in this new reality. In sharing our preliminary reflections, we hope to offer some pathways toward navigating such technological advancements, today and in future.

CURRENT DEBATE SURROUNDING AI

Current hesitations around the use of AI in education are simply the next phase of a decades-long discussion on the feasibility and necessity of bringing new technologies into the classroom which, in recent years, has also engaged topics such as text messaging (Carrington, 2005) and machine translation (Urlaub & Dessein, 2022).

With regards to the language classroom, Urlaub and Dessein (2022) diffuse the perceived disruption caused by machine translation, such as Google Translate, to the acquisition of language-learning outcomes by drawing an intriguing comparison with pocket calculators in Mathematics classrooms, which became a widespread practice in schools only once the S.A.T. permitted their use in 1994. Initial debates in the 1970s hinged upon whether the availability of pocket calculators in the mathematics classroom would lead to a loss of basic arithmetic skills among students. Urlaub and Dessein (2022) point to a shift in instructor perception of the pocket calculator, as it went from being considered an impediment to a learning tool that could optimize learning outcomes. Analogously, they argue that a targeted and thoughtful approach toward machine translation in the language classroom could enhance learning outcomes. The prevailing concern is that the frequent use of machine translation could prevent students from accumulating the skills necessary to produce written communication in the target language without the support of aids (51). Urlaub and Dessein (2022) admit that there is a real danger that tools such as Google Translate can contribute to a reductionistic perception of language and language learning. They underscore that if language proficiency is "treated as a tool, it reduces human beings to speakers exchanging messages in crude manners that are agnostic of the sociocultural embeddedness of message and speaker" (p. 57). Naturally, this concern has implications for oral and written communication across academic disciplines. However, the possibility that communication in a foreign language could be reduced to mere "translation" particularly stands out in the language classroom. In order to combat this outcome, Urlaub and Dessein (2022) argue that we must understand language proficiency as a nuanced and context-sensitive

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