



Review of AI in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching: Theory and Practice by Marcel Danesi¹

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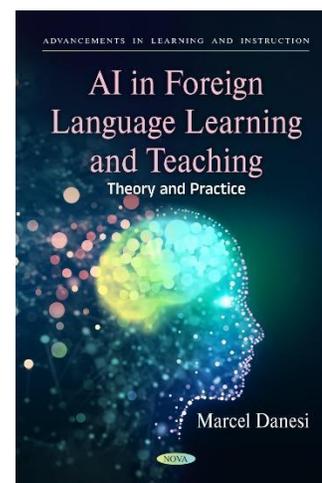
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Integrating technology into language teaching has gained much attention in recent years. Due to its personalized and interactive features, technology is reported to be able to enhance the learning experience (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). Among the available technological tools is Artificial Intelligence (AI). Surprisingly, AI has rapidly become a pivotal topic in foreign language education, especially with the advent of advanced AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in late 2022 (for a recent review, study Al-khresheh, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). Teachers and L2 educators have been very cautious regarding the potential of AI tools (Yan, 2023). As researchers, we investigate the effectiveness of technology and AI tools in second language (L2) learning. We have always struggled to find a comprehensive reference that examines AI's potential concerning various aspects and components of L2. However, *AI in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching: Theory and Practice* by Marcel Danesi (2024) is a timely contribution that examines how AI can transform language learning and teaching. Overall, the book's purpose is clear: to survey the research on AI in language education and to explore the prospects and challenges that AI brings to foreign language teaching. In this regard, Danesi frames the work as an exploration of the "truly momentous revolution" underway in language pedagogy. In particular, he asks whether AI algorithms can *enhance* language learning and even replace human instructors—a dilemma posed by recent educators. By addressing this question directly, the book positions itself at the forefront of the current discourse on educational technology.

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As ESL/EFL teachers, we believe this work contributes to the discourse by bridging established language-learning theory with cutting-edge AI applications. It connects classical models of second language acquisition with the capabilities of modern AI, thereby offering both a theoretical foundation and practical insights for educators. Throughout the book, Danesi uses ChatGPT as a primary example of AI's potential, given its remarkable facility for natural dialogue and its accessibility to teachers. In essence, this book provides an essential overview of the opportunities and challenges presented by AI, aiming to inform teachers, researchers, and policymakers on how to harness this emerging technology in pedagogically sound ways.

The book comprises six chapters, each focusing on a general theme. For example, the author guides readers on a journey that begins with the relationship between theories and technology in foreign language teaching. Simply speaking, the author discusses AI from theory to its applications.

Chapter 1 provides a historical and pedagogical overview of technology's role in foreign language teaching (FLT), setting the stage for the emergence of AI. Danesi recounts how the introduction of the language laboratory and later Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) were major innovations that augmented traditional instruction. The chapter discusses examples of contemporary AI-driven platforms already in use: for instance, the Duolingo app can simulate human-like conversation practice, and ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant) provides personalized

pronunciation coaching. Chapter 1 is a substantial introductory chapter that situates AI within the continuum of language teaching innovation. One of its key strengths is the historical lens, which compares the advent of AI to the language lab and CALL. Notably, in this chapter, the author flags issues such as academic integrity and chatbot errors early on, establishing academic honesty and critical thinking from the outset. One limitation of this chapter is that the discussion of historical technologies could have been enriched with a bit more about their pedagogical impact, for instance, why the language lab and audio-lingual methods eventually fell out of favor. In summary, Chapter 1 establishes the significance of the topic and the author's stance that AI will augment, rather than replace, the human teacher.

In Chapter 2, Danesi turns to the theories and processes of foreign language learning, examining how AI, particularly chatbot AI, relates to classical theories of second language acquisition (SLA). He opens by defining the ultimate goal of FL learning as *bilingual competence*, which is evidenced by the ability to communicate and translate accurately and with cultural appropriateness between the native and target languages. Chapter 2 is academically rich and establishes a crucial link between AI technology and language learning theory. One major strength of this chapter is its thorough grounding in SLA literature. Danesi revisits core theories, such as Interlanguage and Universal Grammar, allowing readers to see AI's role not just as a new gadget, but within the broader context of language learning research. However, a potential weakness of Chapter 2 might be that it leans somewhat heavily on translation, such as translating idioms from Spanish, English, or Chinese. Another minor shortcoming is that readers unfamiliar with SLA theory might find the theory sections dense. Overall, Chapter 2 effectively links theory with practice. It validates the notion that AI's successes are not just engineering marvels but have *pedagogical significance*.

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If you are a language teacher, Chapter 3 is likely to catch your attention. In this chapter, the author focuses on the details of language proficiency, specifically linguistic competence, which encompasses the formal aspects of language, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing skills. Danesi breaks down this competence into sub-components, each corresponding to traditional areas of language instruction, and examines how AI can contribute to learning and teaching each area. Chapter 3 is one of the most practically-oriented chapters, and its strength lies in systematically connecting *each element* of linguistic form to concrete AI applications. For teachers reading this book, this chapter is likely to spark many ideas for classroom practice. For example, the description of using a chatbot with speech recognition to practice pronunciation *without fear of embarrassment* is compelling. One strength of this chapter is its use of specific examples that make the advantages tangible. The anecdote about the Italian or English /l/ pronunciation issue and how the AI identified it shows that the author has actively experimented with these tools. It lends credence to his claims – the reader gets the sense that these are not just hypothetical benefits, but ones Danesi

has observed in practice. One potential limitation of this chapter is that it may appear overly enthusiastic about AI's capabilities in practice, with somewhat less emphasis on empirical evidence of efficacy. For example, while it's logical that practicing speaking with a chatbot will help fluency, the book does not cite specific studies measuring learning gains from chatbot use in pronunciation or grammar (aside from user perception studies). In summary, Chapter 3 excels in translating AI's abstract potential into the everyday work of language teaching. Its main contribution is showing that linguistic accuracy and knowledge, often considered the domain of rote learning, can be tackled in new, engaging, and personalized ways with AI.

One interesting feature of this book is how the author systematically addresses primary language components; for example, having addressed linguistic form, Chapter 4 moves on to communicative competence. Communicative competence encompasses not only grammar but also the ability to use language appropriately in context, knowing what to say, when, and how in a culturally and socially acceptable manner. Traditionally, teachers have used pair work, role-plays, or native-speaker conversation partners to address this need. AI chatbots present a novel tool: they can serve as simulated conversation partners and are available at any time. Chapter 4 explores this idea in depth. The chapter also addresses affective factors in communication practice. Speaking with a human in a foreign language can be intimidating; learners often fear making mistakes or feeling self-conscious. Danesi reiterates a point from Chapter 3 that chatting with an AI carries *no social judgment*. This means students can practice dialogues, without the anxiety they may feel when speaking to a person. However, Danesi carefully discusses the limitations and irreplaceable aspects of human interaction. He notes that there are specific conversational skills that a machine still cannot fully replicate. For instance, genuinely spontaneous, emotionally nuanced communication – reading subtle tones, body language, or emotions – remains a uniquely human domain. However, a minor critique of Chapter 4 is that it does not thoroughly explore how to integrate chatbot conversations into a curriculum. Another potential limitation is relying on the assumption that chatbots will always produce *correct and appropriate* language. In reality, although AI often does, there are cases where it might give stilted or even incorrect responses. Overall, Chapter 4 presents a compelling argument that AI can enhance the communicative aspect of language learning, which has traditionally been the most challenging to extend beyond the classroom walls.

Furthermore, this book dedicates one chapter (i.e., Chapter 5) to addressing a less commonly discussed dimension of language proficiency: conceptual competence. This refers to the ability to understand and use a target language's conceptual structures and figurative language. The chapter argues that conceptual competence is essential for *true* fluency. Without it, even advanced students can sound unnatural or miss subtle meanings. For example, understanding why English speakers say, "time flies" rather than "time runs" (as some other languages might) or why we "catch a cold" instead of

“receive a cold” involves grasping the underlying metaphors and usage conventions of English. In this chapter, Danesi examines how AI can support this high-level aspect of language. The surprising thesis of the chapter is that modern AI, such as ChatGPT, appears to possess a considerable degree of *figurative language competence* due to its training on large text datasets. A potential weakness or challenge of Chapter 5 is that it addresses a domain where AI, although impressive, may also be more susceptible to subtle mistakes. For instance, some idioms are region-specific or carry connotations that an AI might not fully convey in an explanation. In summary, Chapter 5 adds a layer of richness to the book. It broadens the scope from tangible skills to the realm of *culture and thought* in language.

6/7 The final chapter synthesizes the insights from previous chapters and looks toward implementation, discussing a blended foreign language teaching model that integrates AI tools with traditional methods. Danesi frames education as being “on the threshold of a veritable paradigm shift.” (p. 22). In this chapter, the author calls for rethinking the roles of learner, teacher, and curriculum. In this regard, Danesi emphasizes that learners now have unprecedented access to information and practice opportunities via AI. He describes a shift to a more learner-centric pedagogy in which students use AI resources to supplement their learning. Moving to the teacher, Danesi confronts the question that loomed from Chapter 1: what is the teacher’s role if AI can do so much? He reiterates the book’s stance: the human teacher remains *indispensable*, but their role is evolving. The teacher becomes an orchestrator and facilitator of learning experiences, incorporating AI where it can enhance learning. In the Epilogue of Chapter 6, Danesi reiterates that we cannot turn back the clock on technology. AI is here to stay, and the key is to *embrace change* while preserving what is fundamentally human in teaching. One strength of this chapter is that it reinforces the indispensability of human elements. Danesi effectively dispels the binary thinking of “AI vs teacher” by reframing it as “AI + teacher.”. If we look for weaknesses, one could be that the chapter, being visionary, does not deeply tackle the logistical and ethical hurdles of implementing AI at scale. For instance, issues such as data privacy, equity of access (not all students may have access to the latest AI tools or stable internet), and the need for institutional support are not discussed in detail.

In conclusion, *AI in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching: Theory and Practice* by Marcel Danesi is a groundbreaking work that provides a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the intersection between AI technology and language education. Finally, Danesi’s book is a significant contribution that succeeds in its aim: it examines the implications of a momentous technological revolution for foreign language teaching. It does so in an insightful way for educators, researchers, and policymakers alike. It invites us to embrace AI thoughtfully – not as a threat, but as a tool that, combined with sound pedagogy, can enrich language learning.

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