

Language teaching in the age of AI

Context

In November 2024, the British Council and France Education international hosted an international workshop on AI and language teaching, welcoming 80 participants from numerous countries, including France, the UK, Germany, Poland, Spain, the USA, Hong Kong, Italy, and Belgium.

Over two days, the workshop brought together stakeholders - teachers, researchers, teacher educators and education leaders. We sought to harness the group's collective intelligence to examine questions linked to AI and language teaching. This document, created with the help of the AI tools *ChatGPT* and *Napkin*, shares some of the reflections from these discussions. We very much hope that these ideas will feed into the important conversations about how best to harness the potential of this new technology that are taking place in France, the UK, Europe and beyond.

You can find out more about the event, watch interviews with the participants and listen to an AI-generated summary of our discussions on our [website](#).

If you would like to give your opinion on these ideas, please don't hesitate to get in touch. Our email address is english.programmes@britishcouncil.fr.



Participants taking part in one of the workshops.

5 ways AI will impact language learning in the future

As artificial intelligence begins to redefine our relationship with languages, our participants predict that AI tools will be an essential part of the future of language teaching. They identify five factors that will have an important bearing on the way we learn, teach and assess languages.

Continuing relevance

- Learning a language will remain essential, driven by factors such as distinguishing oneself in the job market, understanding cultural nuances, and maintaining authentic communication with other humans.

Pragmatic language use

- Languages in schools and universities may be taught less often as subjects in the future. Instead, other subjects may increasingly be taught through foreign or second languages, as AI facilitates the preparation, teaching and understanding of such classes.
- Language teaching will place increasing emphasis on developing cultural understanding, as the necessity to learn a language for communication diminishes.

Multilingualism

- Advances in AI could empower individuals to learn multiple languages, albeit potentially with lower levels of proficiency in each, thanks to AI assistance.
- While AI might threaten linguistic diversity by promoting the dominance of a single variant of a language, it could also encourage the teaching of regional and less commonly spoken languages, thus revitalising and promoting them.

Motivation

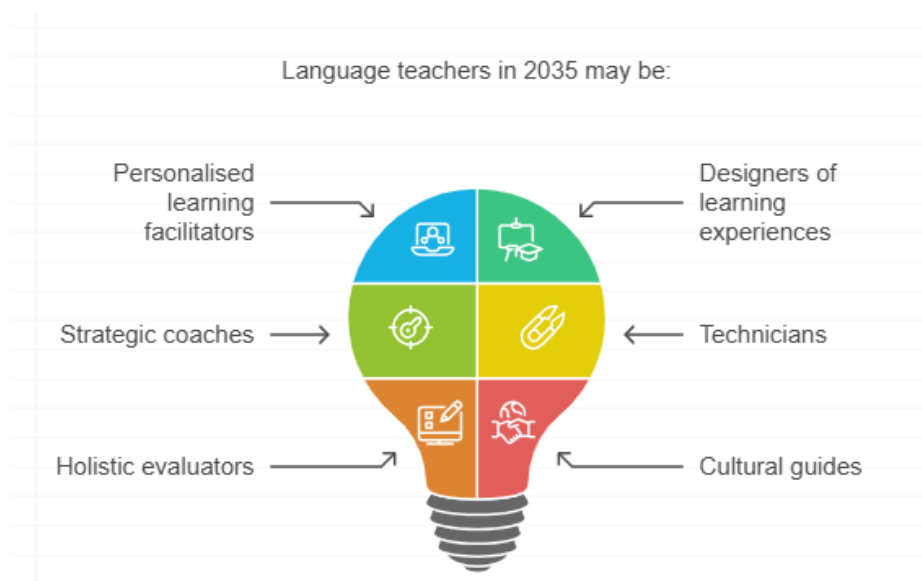
- AI could mean learners increasingly engage with language learning only as a curricular obligation rather than for personal or practical reasons, as AI translation tools reduce the necessity to study and master a language oneself.

Equality of access

- AI risks deepening disparities between regions and countries by exacerbating unequal access to technology and paid services unless appropriate measures are undertaken to prevent this.

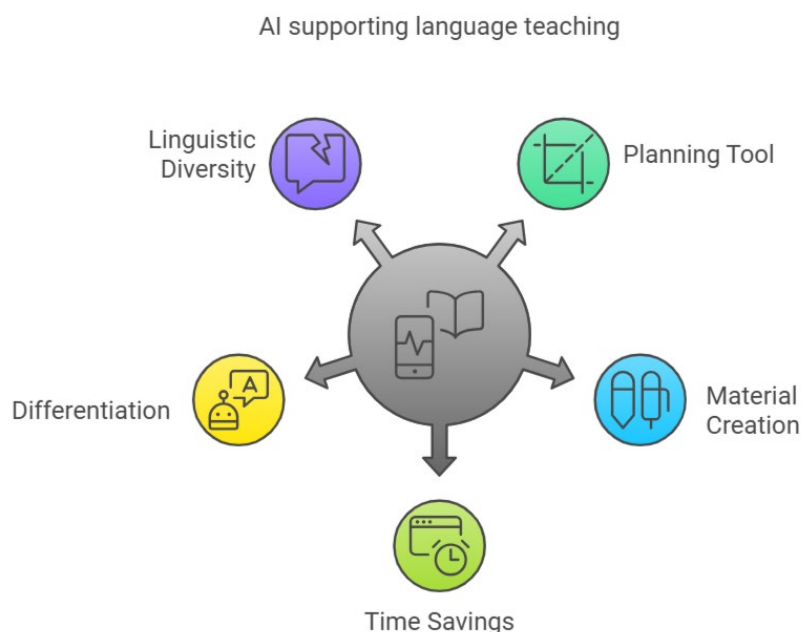
The role of the language teacher in 2035

Our participants envisioned various future roles for language teachers in the future. Here are a selection of their predictions:



- **Designers of learning experiences:** Teachers could become “curators of AI tools”, with their role being merely to select appropriate AI tools to support their students’ learning.
- **Technicians:** According to some participants, teachers might be reduced to the role of technicians, merely crafting prompts to generate AI-led learning pathways. They may thus lose the creativity and professional expertise that currently define their profession.
- **Cultural guides:** language teachers could increasingly become cultural guides, emphasising intercultural skills and helping students understand cultural nuances rather than teaching the language itself.
- **Holistic evaluators:** Teachers might become less involved in direct teaching, adopting a role more focused on evaluating both the learning process and students' ability to communicate in authentic contexts.
- **Strategic coaches:** Some participants envision teachers focusing on helping students to develop effective learning strategies for the languages of their choice, and on encouraging them to explore new languages.
- **Facilitators of personalised learning pathways:** Thanks to artificial intelligence and the consequent availability of data on our learners, the role of the teacher could be to design tailor-made learning journeys for each student, planning human and AI contact time, monitoring individual progress and adjusting activities to optimise language acquisition.

5 ways AI could enhance the learning process



1. **Planning tool:** AI could be valuable for formal and informal lesson preparation. However, teachers should critically examine AI-generated suggestions to ensure their quality and relevance to learners. A suggested approach by participants involves delegating 80% of lesson planning to AI with the teacher maintaining 20% of the work.
2. **Creation of materials:** AI will allow for the creation of high-quality interactive multimedia content.

AI-generated interactions will be able to simulate real-life models of communication, which will support the development of students' oral skills. AI will be able to act as a competent and non-intimidating conversational partner, thus helping learners overcome their inhibitions regarding oral expression.

Warning: It will nonetheless remain essential to maintain the place of authentic real-world documents and of contact with real human speakers within the learning process. After all, connecting with the people and cultures that speak a language is and will remain the goal of language learning.

3. **Saving time on administrative tasks:** By reducing administrative burdens, AI will allow teachers to prioritise lesson planning and direct interaction with students, optimising the overall quality of the learning experience.

4. **Differentiation:** AI offers the ability to create tailored materials and activities adapted to the needs of each individual learner. Teachers can thus personalise lessons to ensure they are within a learner's zone of proximal development and that they are therefore supporting language acquisition effectively.

AI could also help learners become more aware of their own skills, providing guidance on the next steps in their personal progression and thus enhancing their autonomy as learners.

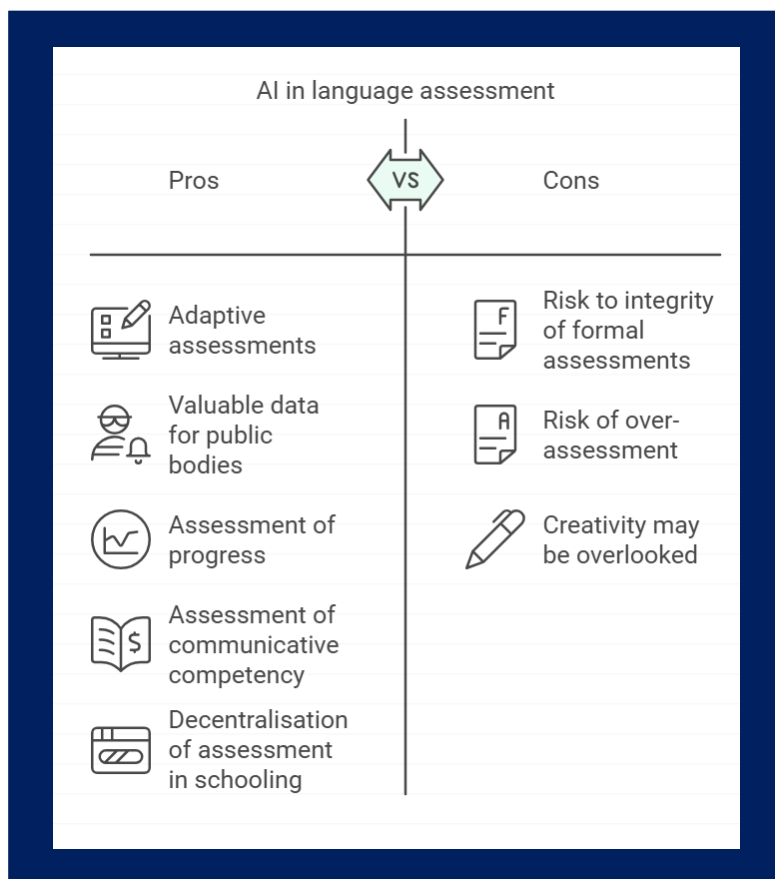
5. **Promoting linguistic diversity:** AI facilitates the creation of multilingual materials, providing access to a wide range of accents, dialects, and linguistic variations that can enrich learning experiences.

AI can also help teachers support students whose mother tongues differ from the language of teaching and learning, highlighting the value of the multilingualism at the heart of our societies.



Lively debates during the workshop.

Reflections on AI and Language Assessment

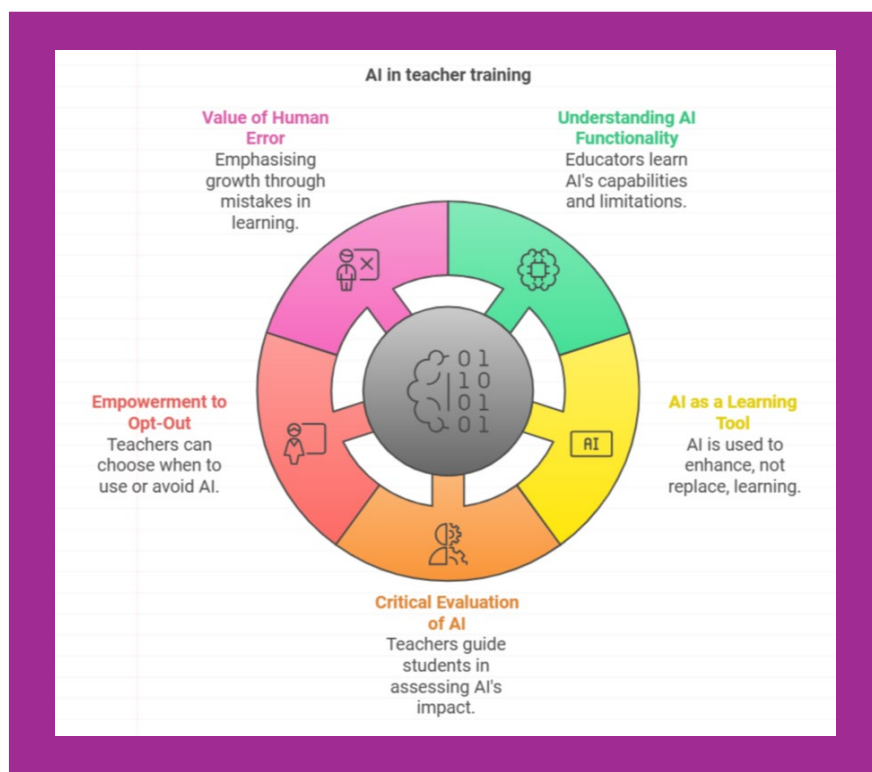


The participants felt that the integration of artificial intelligence into school assessment presents both opportunities and challenges. While AI could **compromise the integrity of traditional assessment techniques**, it will offer **adaptive and personalised assessment methods** tailored to learners' needs. This will enable a more **nuanced understanding** of linguistic skills that will go beyond merely situating learners on a generic scale such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

However, participants emphasised that data on student performance should be managed by public organisations to ensure **ethical use**. Large-scale data collection can provide valuable **insights into trends in language proficiency** but also raises concerns about possible **over-assessment** and an undervaluing of the creativity in learners' responses.

Ultimately, it was felt that a thoughtful integration of AI could **reduce the centrality of high stakes testing in education**, promoting **continuous and nuanced assessments** that value the holistic development of the learner.

Reflections on the role of AI in teacher training



- **Integrating AI into initial and continuing teacher training is crucial.**

Teachers must understand how AI works and its limitations.

- **Teachers should see AI as a tool to enhance learning, not as an end goal.**

Training must help teachers discern where AI adds value and where it does not. It should empower teachers *not* to use technology when it does not serve the learning process.

It was felt that we should avoid anthropomorphic language when discussing AI and remember that AI is a tool, not a colleague - a new lexicon may be necessary to help us avoid attributing human traits to AI.

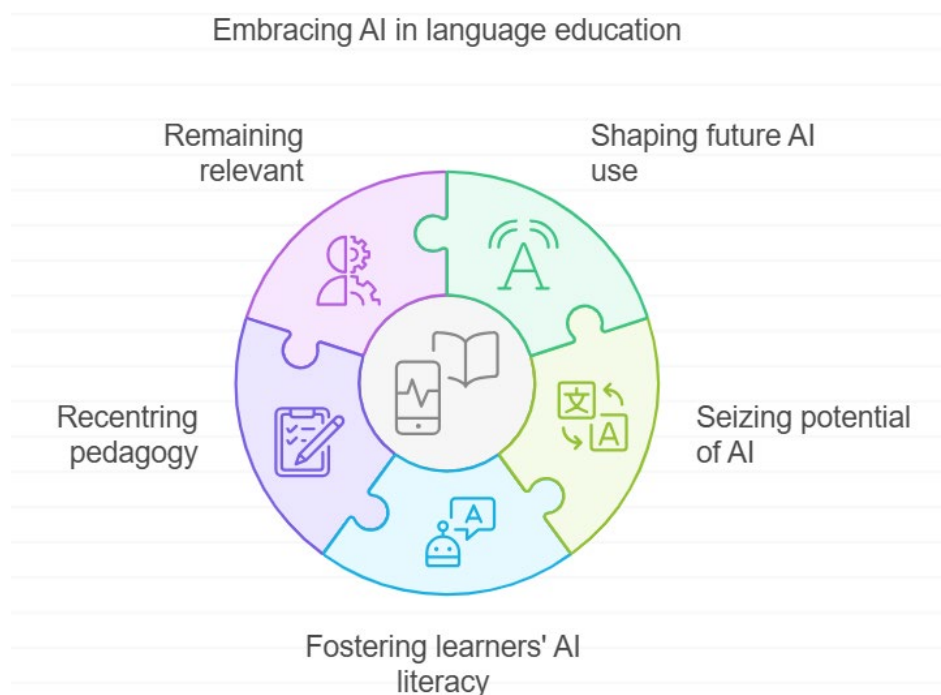
- **Training should help teachers to cultivate critical-thinking skills.**

Teachers and learners will need to develop a critical perspective on AI. Teachers need to learn how to help their students to see its limitations and to consider its environmental and social impacts.

- **Teachers need to continue to value learners' errors.**

The process of making mistakes is central to the process of learning a language, and teachers must continue to value this in a world where AI may come to seem infallible.

Conclusions: 5 reasons to begin experimenting with AI



- 1. Shaping future uses of AI:** AI is going to impact language teaching in the future, and so it is important that teachers be involved in discussions today around how it should be regulated and used to the best advantage in the future. Their first-hand experience and their expertise are invaluable.
- 2. Seizing AI's potential:** AI has enormous potential to support language teaching and to promote multilingualism. It is therefore important that teachers begin to experiment with it today in order to explore how best to harness that potential.
- 3. Fostering learners' AI literacy:** AI will be an important tool in the job market and in everyday life, and so teachers will need to prepare learners for this reality by modelling good practice and helping them develop appropriate skills.
- 4. Recentring pedagogy:** AI has the potential to emancipate teachers from many routine administrative elements of their work and thus allow them to recentre their efforts on accompanying their learners in their development.
- 5. Remaining relevant:** Teachers, like many professions, will need to adapt to remain relevant and maintain their professional status.