Using AI to Enhance Language Teaching: Introduction

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The AI wave has arrived, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) students and teachers at Hawaiʻi Pacific University (HPU) decided to be courageous and learn how to surf it. In the rapidly evolving landscape of language education, the integration of AI presents exciting opportunities to enhance and transform language teaching and learning practices for the better.

In Spring 2024, I taught a BA + MA bi-level TESOL course at HPU titled "Teaching Second Language Reading and Writing Skills." As one of the class assignments, I facilitated an AI Hackathon, inviting my students to explore the creative applications of AI for teaching second language (L2) reading and writing. While the term "hackathon" typically involves coding, in this case, no code was used, but the students experimented with prompting and image generation using existing AI tools such as ChatGPT, Co-Pilot, Claude, Gemini, You.com, and DALL-E. The students had to pitch an idea for using AI to enhance L2 reading and writing instruction within a limited time.

The Hackathon challenged students to work in pairs and propose innovative ideas for implementing AI to support the development of L2 reading and writing skills. They were tasked with delivering a 10-minute pitch, including a short presentation and an interactive demonstration, followed by a 5-minute Q&A session. The proposals were evaluated based on these criteria:

1. appropriateness for the target population;
2. feasibility for real-classroom implementation;
3. alignment with L2 reading and writing learning outcomes; and
4. the reflection of relevant concepts and principles.

Working in teams, the students presented diverse AI-driven solutions, showcasing their creativity and critical thinking. The event kicked off with Naoyuki Hamada and Eric Cruz-Alvarado's pitch on "Can AI create better questions than teachers about serious and philosophical issues?," in which they compared AI's ability to create stimulating questions for English as a foreign language students at a Japanese high school to teacher-generated questions, using "To Kill a Mockingbird" as an example. Hamada and Cruz-Alvarado's pitch was followed by Jada Bruno and Kylie Asuncion's pitch on "English for Fun (EFF)," an AI-powered app that helps teachers create effective lessons and activities for teaching L2 reading and writing skills. Next, Camryn Potter and Haley Coppock gave a thought-provoking pitch about "AI and Culture," leveraging the limitations of existing AI tools to prompt

critical thinking skills from students. Finally, Miki Davidson and Keegan Jones' pitch on "Artistic Intelligence: How AI is Transforming Art Creation," won everyone's heart. Miki and Keegan showcased how to use image generation tools such as DALL-E via GPT4 to design engaging activities for students to replicate famous paintings by van Gough and Dali through prompt writing.

At the end of the Hackathon, all audiences took an anonymous vote on whose pitch they thought was the best. The winning team received a small prize, and all participants were awarded a certificate of completion. To view the entire Hackathon, visit this link.

Through this AI Hackathon, the students demonstrated their ability to think critically about the integration of AI in language education, considering both the pedagogical and practical implications of their proposals. The AI Hackathon also enabled them to critically evaluate existing AI tools' strengths and limitations. The experience not only challenged them to explore the intersection of technology and language teaching but also fostered their creativity, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking skills — all of which are essential for the modern language educator.

This introduction sets the stage for the articles on this collection, which will delve deeper into the specific AI-driven language teaching solutions presented by the students and the implications for the field of language education. By showcasing these innovative ideas, this collection aims to inspire language instructors and researchers to further explore the transformative potential of AI in enhancing language teaching and learning.

I hope this small-scale class-wide event inspires TESOL and Applied Linguistics instructors in higher education to provide opportunities for students to experiment with AI for language teaching and to express their creativity through AI.

About the Author

Ann T. Choe, PhD, is a Senior Adjunct Instructor of Applied Linguistics and former Director of International Group Programs at Hawai'i Pacific University. Her research interests include conversation analysis, language assessment, and language and technology. Ann currently serves as the AI Research Analyst at the Hawai'i Center for AI.