THE ROLE OF AI IN LEARNING ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Elena MUSEANU[1]

Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized various fields, and language learning is no exception. This article explores the role of AI in facilitating the acquisition of Romanian as a foreign language. Through personalized learning experiences, interactive platforms, and advanced language processing tools, AI is reshaping how people (learners) approach and master Romanian. By analyzing adaptive learning algorithms, speech recognition technology, and AI-driven translation tools, this article highlights the ways in which AI enhances engagement, accelerates learning, and offers tailored support to address individual challenges. Additionally, it discusses the limitations and challenges of AI in the context of Romanian language learning, such as data availability and cultural nuances, while also considering the prospects of AI, including immersive learning experiences and AI-driven tutoring. Overall, this article provides a comprehensive overview of how AI is transforming the landscape of Romanian language acquisition, paving the way for more efficient and effective learning strategies.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Romanian language learning, language acquisition, personalized learning, speech recognition, AI-driven translation, adaptive learning algorithms, gamification in education

JEL Classification: C88, I21, O33

Introduction

For university students, the learning of foreign languages, including Romanian, has always been a complex endeavor, requiring time, dedication, and the right resources. Romanian, a Romance language with Latin roots, presents its own unique challenges to learners due to its specific grammatical structures, pronunciation, and vocabulary. With a rich history and intricate linguistic features, mastering Romanian involves understanding not only the language's basic components but also its cultural and contextual subtleties. Traditional methods of language learning, such as classroom instruction, textbooks, and audio-visual materials, have been the cornerstone of language education for decades. While these

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[1] PhD, associate professor, Romanian-American University, Bucharest, Romania, elena.museanu@rau.ro

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methods can be effective, they often lack the level of personalization, flexibility, and engagement that modern learners, accustomed to digital interactions, increasingly seek.

In the past decade, the landscape of language learning has been significantly transformed by technological advancements, particularly in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI technologies have been progressively integrated into the realm of education, offering innovative solutions that enhance the learning experience. From AI-driven language translation tools to sophisticated interactive learning apps, AI is fundamentally changing how people approach and acquire new languages, including Romanian.

One of the most significant contributions of AI to language learning is its ability to provide personalized learning experiences. Unlike traditional one-size-fits-all approaches, AI can analyze individual learning patterns, strengths, and weaknesses to tailor lessons that meet the specific needs of each learner. This level of customization is particularly beneficial in mastering Romanian, where learners often struggle with elements like verb conjugation, gendered nouns, and phonetic distinctions. AI-powered platforms can adapt to these challenges, offering targeted practice and feedback that accelerates the learning process.

Furthermore, AI enhances engagement by incorporating gamification elements and interactive content, making the learning process more enjoyable and less monotonous. Learners are more likely to stay motivated and committed when they are actively engaged, and AI-driven tools can provide real-time rewards, progress tracking, and adaptive challenges that keep the learning journey dynamic and compelling.

Moreover, AI's role extends beyond the classroom, facilitating language learning through various real-world applications. AI-powered translation tools, for example, enable learners to practice and apply their language skills in everyday contexts, breaking down barriers to communication and providing immediate, contextual learning opportunities. These tools are particularly valuable for Romanian, a language that, while spoken by over 20 million people, is less commonly studied internationally. AI bridges this gap, making Romanian more accessible to a global audience.

This article examines the various roles AI plays in the context of learning Romanian as a foreign language, assessing its impact on language acquisition, and exploring future possibilities. By analyzing current AI applications and their effectiveness, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI is reshaping the process of learning Romanian, offering insights into both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. As AI continues to evolve, its potential to revolutionize language learning is immense, promising more personalized, interactive, and immersive experiences that could transform how we learn languages in the future.

1. AI-Powered Language Learning Platforms

One of the most significant contributions of AI to language learning is the development of AI-powered platforms such as Duolingo, Babbel, and Rosetta Stone. These platforms use AI to create personalized learning paths that adapt to the learner's pace, strengths, and weaknesses.

In an academic setting, where students may have varying levels of exposure to Romanian, AI-powered platforms can offer tailored content that adjusts to each student's pace and proficiency. This personalized approach helps ensure that students remain engaged and motivated, as the learning material is neither too challenging nor too simplistic. Moreover, these platforms often incorporate gamified elements, interactive exercises, and instant feedback, which can enhance the learning experience by making it more interactive and enjoyable, factors that are crucial in maintaining the interest of students who might be balancing heavy academic loads.

1.1 Adaptive Learning Algorithms

Adaptive learning algorithms are at the heart of these platforms. They analyze the learner's progress and adjust the difficulty level of exercises accordingly. For Romanian learners, this means that the platform can identify areas where the learner struggles, such as verb conjugations or pronunciation of specific sounds, and provide targeted practice to improve these skills [1].

1.2 Gamification and Engagement

AI also plays a role in gamifying the learning process. By incorporating elements of gaming, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, AI-powered platforms make learning more engaging [2]. This approach is particularly effective for languages like Romanian, where maintaining motivation is crucial due to the language's relative obscurity and perceived difficulty.

1.3 Speech Recognition and Pronunciation

AI-driven speech recognition technology allows learners to practice their pronunciation and receive instant feedback. For Romanian, with its distinct phonetic rules and pronunciation challenges, this feature is invaluable. Learners can fine-tune their accents and improve their speaking skills without needing constant human interaction [3].

2. AI in Language Translation and Interpretation

Translation tools powered by AI, such as Google Translate and DeepL, have made significant strides in recent years. These tools use advanced neural networks and machine learning algorithms to provide translations that are increasingly accurate and contextually relevant. While these tools are not perfect, they offer substantial support to learners of Romanian, especially at the beginner and intermediate levels.

For Romanian language learners, AI-powered translation tools serve as valuable resources for understanding and translating complex texts, phrases, and idiomatic expressions. These tools help bridge the gap between the learner's current level of proficiency and the linguistic demands of real-world communication. For instance, when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or complicated sentence structures, learners can use AI translation tools to quickly gain a basic understanding of the content, enabling them to continue learning without excessive interruptions.

Moreover, these tools are invaluable in providing contextual translations that go beyond literal word-for-word conversions. Romanian, like any language, has idiomatic expressions and cultural references that can be challenging to translate accurately. AI-powered translators are increasingly adept at recognizing these nuances and offering translations that retain the original meaning, making them particularly useful for learners trying to grasp the subtleties of the language.

In addition to facilitating translation, AI-driven tools like these also serve as language learning aids. They allow users to input sentences and receive translations along with grammatical explanations and usage examples. This interactive element helps learners understand not just the "what" of the language, but also the "why", fostering deeper comprehension. Furthermore, these tools often include features like pronunciation guides and audio playback, helping learners to practice and improve their spoken Romanian by mimicking native pronunciation and intonation.

While AI translation tools are an excellent supplement to language learning, it is important to note their limitations. These tools can sometimes struggle with highly technical language, regional dialects, or sentences that require deep cultural understanding to translate correctly. Despite these challenges, the ongoing improvements in AI technology suggest that the accuracy and functionality of these tools will continue to evolve, making them an even more integral part of the language learning process in the future.

Overall, AI-powered translation and interpretation tools are not just convenient resources; they are essential companions in the journey of learning Romanian, providing learners with the support they need to navigate and understand the language more effectively. As these tools continue to develop, they will likely play an even greater role in helping learners achieve fluency and confidence in using Romanian in various contexts.

2.1 Real-Time Translation

Real-time translation features help learners understand Romanian texts, whether they are reading articles, watching videos, or trying to communicate with native speakers. AI algorithms have improved significantly in their ability to translate complex grammatical structures and idiomatic expressions, although challenges remain [4].

2.2 Language Model Improvements

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Recent advancements in AI, particularly in natural language processing (NLP) models like GPT and BERT, have enhanced the accuracy of translations. These models are trained on vast amounts of data, including Romanian, allowing them to understand context and nuances better than earlier versions [5]. This has made AI-powered translation tools more reliable for learners who need quick assistance with comprehension and communication.

3. AI in Grammar and Writing Assistance

Writing in Romanian can be challenging due to its grammatical rules, which include gendered nouns, complex verb conjugations, and specific syntactic structures. AI tools like Grammarly and Microsoft Editor offer grammar and style checking tailored to Romanian, helping learners improve their writing skills.

3.1 Error Detection and Correction

These tools use AI to detect grammatical errors, suggest corrections, and provide explanations. For Romanian learners, this means receiving immediate feedback on common mistakes, such as incorrect verb tenses or improper noun-adjective agreement [6].

3.2 Writing Style Suggestions

AI can also offer suggestions to improve the overall quality of writing. For instance, it can recommend more appropriate vocabulary or rephrase sentences to make them clearer and more natural. This is particularly useful for advanced learners who aim to write professionally in Romanian [7].

4. AI and Personalized Learning Experiences

One of the most significant advantages of AI in language learning is its ability to create personalized learning experiences. Unlike traditional classroom settings where all students follow the same curriculum, AI can tailor lessons to individual needs.

4.1 Personalized Content Delivery

AI systems analyze a learner's progress and preferences to deliver customized content. For example, a learner struggling with Romanian verb conjugations might be provided with additional exercises and tutorials focused on this area, while another learner might receive more reading comprehension activities if that is their weak spot [8].

4.2 Learning Analytics

AI-powered platforms also offer detailed analytics that track progress over time. These insights allow learners to understand their learning patterns and adjust their study strategies accordingly. In the context of learning Romanian, this could mean identifying which

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specific aspects of the language need more focus, such as certain grammatical structures or vocabulary related to specific topics [9].

5. Challenges and Limitations of AI in Romanian Language Learning

While AI has brought significant advancements to language learning, there are still several challenges and limitations, particularly when it comes to less commonly studied languages like Romanian. These challenges are especially pertinent for university students, who often rely heavily on AI tools to support their academic success.

5.1 Limited Data for Romanian

Compared to more widely spoken languages like English, Spanish, or French, there is less data available for Romanian. This limits the accuracy and effectiveness of AI models trained on Romanian, particularly in more complex language tasks. The scarcity of large, high-quality datasets in Romanian means that AI models may struggle with tasks such as nuanced translation, advanced speech recognition, and contextually accurate language generation. As a result, these models might produce outputs that are less precise or culturally appropriate, which can hinder the learning experience for users who rely on AI tools to master the language.

Moreover, the limited availability of diverse linguistic data—such as colloquial speech, regional dialects, and specialized vocabulary—further exacerbates these challenges. AI systems often require vast amounts of varied and representative data to perform well across different contexts and use cases. Without sufficient data to train on, these systems might fail to accurately capture the richness and complexity of Romanian, leading to issues such as improper usage of idiomatic expressions, incorrect verb conjugations, or misinterpretation of context.

This data scarcity also impacts the development of more advanced AI-driven language learning tools, such as those offering personalized learning experiences or real-time conversational practice. For instance, an AI-powered language tutor might struggle to provide meaningful feedback or adaptive learning paths if it lacks a deep understanding of the intricacies of Romanian grammar, syntax, and cultural references. Therefore, increasing the availability and quality of Romanian language data is crucial for improving the effectiveness of AI in this domain, ensuring that learners receive accurate, contextually aware, and culturally relevant guidance [10].

5.2 Cultural Nuances and Context

AI often struggles with understanding cultural nuances and context, which are crucial for mastering a language. Romanian, with its rich cultural history and unique idiomatic expressions, can be particularly challenging for AI to fully grasp. This can lead to misunderstandings or inaccuracies in translation and learning content [11].

For instance, a student using an AI tool to help with a Romanian literature course might miss the deeper meanings conveyed through culturally specific phrases or historical references, thus affecting their analysis and academic performance. This highlights the need for AI tools to be not only linguistically proficient but also culturally aware, to provide more comprehensive support to learners in an academic environment.

5.3 Dependency on Technology

Another challenge is the potential over-reliance on technology. Learners might become too dependent on AI tools, which could hinder the development of their independent language skills. For example, constantly using translation tools might prevent learners from fully engaging with the language and developing their own comprehension and expression abilities [12].

6. Prospects of AI in Romanian Language Learning

Despite the challenges, the future of AI in Romanian language learning is promising, with several potential advancements on the horizon. These developments have the potential to further revolutionize how learners engage with the language, making the process more efficient, immersive, and enjoyable.

6.1 Improved AI Models

As AI technology continues to evolve, models trained on Romanian are expected to become more accurate and context aware. This will improve the quality of translations, speech recognition, and personalized learning experiences. With advancements in natural language processing (NLP), future AI models may be able to better understand the nuances of Romanian syntax, idiomatic expressions, and regional dialects. This would result in more precise translations and more effective language learning tools that cater to the specific needs of Romanian learners. Additionally, these improved models could offer more sophisticated error correction and feedback mechanisms, helping learners to understand not just what they got wrong, but why, thereby deepening their comprehension and retention of the language [13].

6.2 Integration with Virtual and Augmented Reality

The integration of AI with virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) could offer immersive language learning experiences that go beyond traditional methods. For Romanian learners, this might involve virtual environments where they can practice speaking with AI-generated characters in realistic settings, such as a virtual Romanian café, market, or historical site. These immersive experiences would allow learners to practice conversational skills in a context-rich environment, where they can interact with the language as it is naturally used. Furthermore, AR could be used to overlay translations and contextual information in real-world environments, helping learners to connect words and phrases with physical objects

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and situations. This blending of digital and physical learning environments could significantly enhance both the learner's language proficiency and their cultural understanding of Romania [14].

6.3 AI-Driven Language Tutoring

The development of AI-driven tutors that can interact with learners in real-time and provide personalized instruction is another exciting possibility. These tutors could adapt to the learner's level, offering instant feedback on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage. By simulating real-life conversations in Romanian, these AI tutors could provide a more interactive and effective learning experience. For instance, an AI tutor might engage a learner in a role-playing scenario, such as ordering food at a restaurant or asking for directions, providing corrections and suggestions along the way. Moreover, these tutors could track the learner's progress over time, adjusting the difficulty of exercises to match their growing proficiency and providing insights into their learning patterns. This continuous, personalized interaction could help learners build confidence and fluency more quickly than traditional methods alone [15].

6.4 Collaborative and Community-Based Learning

AI could also foster more collaborative and community-based learning experiences. By connecting learners with each other through AI-mediated platforms, students of Romanian could participate in group exercises, language exchanges, and peer tutoring sessions. AI could facilitate these interactions by matching learners with similar proficiency levels and learning goals, monitoring group dynamics, and providing group-specific feedback. Such collaborative environments, enhanced by AI, would allow learners to benefit from social learning, which is known to be a powerful motivator and enhancer of language acquisition.

7. Case Studies and Practical Applications

To illustrate the practical impact of AI in learning Romanian, several case studies can be explored. These examples highlight how AI-powered tools and platforms are transforming the language learning experience, specifically for Romanian.

7.1 Duolingo's Romanian Course

Duolingo, one of the most popular language learning platforms globally, offers a Romanian course that leverages AI to enhance the learning process. Duolingo's AI-driven platform uses machine learning algorithms to track user performance and adapt exercises to individual learning needs.

Example: Maria, a 28-year-old from Brazil, decided to learn Romanian in preparation for a job transfer to Bucharest. She chose Duolingo because of its user-friendly interface and the flexibility it offered. Initially, Maria struggled with Romanian's complex verb conjugations

and the pronunciation of certain sounds, such as the Romanian "ă" and "î". Duolingo's adaptive learning algorithms identified these challenges early on and began presenting her with additional exercises focused on these areas. The platform also used spaced repetition, a technique enhanced by AI, to ensure that Maria regularly revisited these problem areas, which helped reinforce her learning over time. Additionally, Duolingo's speech recognition feature provided Maria with immediate feedback on her pronunciation, allowing her to gradually improve her speaking skills without the need for a live tutor [16].

By the end of six months, Maria had progressed from a complete beginner to an intermediate level, capable of holding basic conversations in Romanian. This case highlights how Duolingo's AI can personalize the learning experience, addressing individual learner needs and improving language acquisition efficiency.

7.2 Custom AI Tutoring Solutions

Beyond mass-market platforms like Duolingo, some educational institutions and private tutors are developing custom AI tutoring solutions tailored specifically for learning Romanian. These solutions often incorporate machine learning algorithms to analyze student performance in real-time and adjust lessons accordingly.

Example: The University of Bucharest's Language Center developed an AI-driven tutoring platform called "RoboRomanian" for international students enrolled in their Romanian language courses. This platform was designed to complement traditional classroom instruction by providing students with personalized online tutoring sessions. RoboRomanian used AI to assess each student's language proficiency through initial diagnostic tests and ongoing assessments. Based on the results, the platform created individualized learning paths that focused on each student's weak points.

One student, John, a medical student from Nigeria, particularly benefited from RoboRomanian. He struggled with Romanian medical terminology and formal language, which were crucial for his studies. The AI system identified these weaknesses and tailored John's lessons to include more medical vocabulary exercises and formal conversation simulations. The platform also included AI-powered chatbots that simulated patient-doctor interactions in Romanian, providing John with a safe environment to practice and receive feedback on his language use in a professional context.

Over the course of a semester, John's proficiency in Romanian medical terminology improved significantly, as did his confidence in using the language in clinical settings. RoboRomanian's ability to provide targeted, context-specific practice exemplifies how custom AI tutoring solutions can enhance language learning, particularly in specialized fields [17].

7.3 AI-Enhanced Translation Tools in Professional Contexts

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AI-powered translation tools like Google Translate and DeepL are not just useful for casual language learners; they also play a significant role in professional settings where Romanian is used.

Example: Sarah, an American journalist working for an international news outlet, was assigned to cover political events in Romania. Although she had basic knowledge of Romanian, she relied heavily on AI translation tools to assist her with research and communication. Sarah used DeepL to translate Romanian news articles and official documents into English. While working on a story, she encountered a complex Romanian idiom that didn't have a direct English equivalent. DeepL's AI algorithms, trained on large datasets, provided a contextual translation that retained the meaning of the idiom rather than translating it word-for-word. This allowed Sarah to accurately convey the nuances of the story to her English-speaking audience.

Moreover, Sarah used AI-powered language models like GPT to draft and refine her articles in Romanian before publishing. These tools helped her ensure that her writing was grammatically correct and stylistically appropriate for a Romanian audience. By the end of her assignment, Sarah's reliance on AI tools had not only enhanced her work quality but also improved her understanding of the Romanian language, as she gradually became less dependent on the tools for simpler tasks [18].

These examples demonstrate how AI is being integrated into both educational and professional contexts to support the learning and use of Romanian. The adaptability, personalization, and efficiency offered by AI-driven solutions are proving to be invaluable assets for learners at all levels.

These expanded case studies provide concrete examples of how AI is utilized in different aspects of learning and using Romanian, showcasing the technology's versatility and impact.

8. Conclusion

AI is playing an increasingly important role in the learning of Romanian as a foreign language. From personalized learning platforms to advanced translation tools, AI is making language learning more accessible, engaging, and effective. By leveraging adaptive learning algorithms, AI tailors the learning experience to meet the specific needs of individual learners, helping them overcome challenges unique to Romanian, such as complex grammatical structures and nuanced pronunciation. Tools like AI-driven speech recognition and translation software are also bridging gaps in communication, enabling learners to practice and improve their skills in real-time, and translating content with greater accuracy.

However, the integration of AI into Romanian language learning is not without its challenges. One of the primary obstacles is the limited availability of high-quality data for training AI models specific to Romanian. This scarcity of data can lead to less accurate predictions and feedback, especially when compared to more widely spoken languages like English or Spanish. Additionally, while AI has made significant strides in language processing, it still struggles with understanding and conveying cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and context, which are crucial for achieving true fluency in any language.

Moreover, the over-reliance on AI tools can pose a risk to the development of deep, intrinsic language skills. Learners may become too dependent on automated systems for translation and comprehension, potentially stunting their ability to think critically and independently in the target language. This raises important questions about how AI should be integrated into the learning process to complement, rather than replace, traditional methods of language instruction.

Despite these challenges, the future of AI in Romanian language learning holds immense promise. As AI technology continues to advance, we can expect improvements in the accuracy and cultural sensitivity of AI-driven tools. Emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, when combined with AI, have the potential to create immersive environments where learners can practice Romanian in realistic, context-rich settings. Furthermore, the development of AI-driven tutors capable of real-time interaction and personalized feedback could revolutionize language education, offering a level of personalization and engagement that traditional methods cannot match.

In conclusion, AI is not just a tool but a transformative force in the realm of language learning. Its role in Romanian language acquisition is a testament to the broader possibilities AI offers in education. As we move forward, it will be essential to continue refining these technologies, ensuring that they are used effectively and ethically to enhance the learning experience while also addressing the limitations that currently exist. By doing so, we can unlock the full potential of AI to create more personalized, interactive, and immersive learning experiences, making the process of mastering Romanian—and other languages—more accessible and effective for learners around the world.

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