

One step forward, two steps back: the dance between automation and tradition

Level: Intermediate (B1–B2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Overview: This article discusses the alleged crime wave driven by self-checkouts and the unintended consequences of automation.

Business topic: AI, automation, self-checkout, shrinkage, security

Business language: Words and phrases related to AI and automation in retail, describing trends

Activities: Key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, creating and carrying out a survey, presenting findings

Groups: Whole class, one-to-one, small groups

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss the questions in small groups. Monitor and write any useful vocabulary on the board. Elicit the main ideas that arise from the discussion from the whole class.

2. Reading for gist

- a. Have students skim the article and choose the main idea. Ask students to then scan for phrases that support their answer.

Key:

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3. Key words

- a. Have students match the key words to the definitions individually and then compare their answers in pairs. Elicit answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. *shoplifting*
2. *automation*
3. *crime wave*
4. *unprecedented*
5. *headwind*

6. *concede, (has) conceded / is conceding / will concede*
7. *profit margin, profit margins*
8. *shrinkage*
9. *unmanned*
10. *miscreant*
11. *deter*
12. *stratification*

4. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to find and highlight the relevant parts of the article and compare them with each part of the statements. Have them share their answers in pairs or small groups before eliciting answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. *False. They were unprecedented.*
2. *False. Other strategies are mentioned.*
3. *True*
4. *True*
5. *False. It is easy to sell goods online.*
6. *False. Around twenty per cent fail to pay, and fifteen per cent admit to stealing.*
7. *True*
8. *False. They are investing in hiring real workers for these roles.*
9. *True*

5. Business language – trends

- a. You could set up this activity as a whole-class activity, so students compete against each other to complete the 'race'.

Key:

1. *shoot up, rise, jump*
2. *dip, fall, drop, reduce*
3. *be flat*
4. *add up to*

- b. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete the task. In some instances, more than one answer is possible.

Key:

1. *rose/jumped/shot up*
2. *dip/drop/fall*
3. *add up to*
4. *flat*
5. *reduce*

- c. Ask students to write their sentences individually and share them in pairs or small groups. Ask students to give each other feedback on the correct use of the new language. Monitor and provide as much individual feedback as possible.

If this task is graded, get students to record and send their presentations.

If there is time, encourage follow-up questions and further discussion based on the presentations.

6. Discussion

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

7. Wider business theme – a survey: transforming industries with AI

- a. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups. Ask them first to decide what topic they want to focus on. While it can be self-checkouts and retail, encourage them to choose a sector that is relevant to them and their context. Explain that they are going to create a survey to gauge public opinion regarding the use of AI and how that industry is being transformed by automation, etc.

Have students read the rubric and check understanding by eliciting examples of questions that follow and don't follow the advice mentioned. Then, have students write their questions. Monitor and provide feedback.

Once you have provided feedback, get students to create their surveys. If possible, encourage the use of an online tool since this will also make it easier for students to convert their data into graphs. Ask students to answer each other's surveys and, if needed, involve students from other classes or simply acquaintances. If necessary, students can make up data.

First, ask students to discuss their data in their original pairs or groups and plan their presentations.

Regroup students so they can share their findings with others.