



Podcast: The Role of Tech in Resettlement—AI

Led by: Milad Mozari, Assistant Professor, University of Utah

Guest speakers: Jonathan Amisi, Emerging Technology Specialist, IRC; Will Napier, Student Technologist, University of Utah

January 2024

Introduction

Milad Mozari: Welcome to the Switchboard series, conversations specifically around how technology can be involved in the resettlement process. These audio narratives are layered conversations and sounds edited between people with different lived experiences. Started in Salt Lake City around the initiative of increasing digital literacy in the refugee community, these dialogues are a new vehicle to convey ideas for resettlement agencies to understand what former or current clients perceive in terms of helpful technology—not as standalone solutions, but as a catalyst for thought and future conversations.

My name is Milad Mozari, and I'm an assistant professor at the University of Utah. In this conversation, Jonathan and Will will talk about their initial ideas around artificial intelligence based on their experience of working on a project together in school. I've known Will and Jonathan for a few years, and they have an organic relationship working together towards prototyping tools that assist caseworkers in various languages. This conversation talks about the opportunities of AI and the ethics that should be considered in the expanding field.

Jonathan Amisi: Hello. My name is Jonathan Amisi. I went to school for computer science as a web developer at Salt Lake Community College. Currently I work at the IRC as an Emerging Technology Specialist. Before that, I was an interpreter for Swahili. And I met Will here at the University of Utah when I was helping as a mentor in the class that he was going to.

Will Napier: Yeah, my name is Will Napier. I am currently studying multidisciplinary design at the University of Utah, and before that I studied computer science at Utah Valley University, and then worked for a little while in software engineering professionally. So I met Jonathan. He collaborated with me on a studio project for the MDD program last semester. And we worked on an initial version of an AI project that we're still working on now.

How can artificial intelligence benefit the resettlement community?

WN: Okay. Well, I think in terms of, so, with the resettlement process, I think artificial intelligence's big key point might be the fact that a lot of computer systems right now, every computer system requires some sort of abstract metaphor in order to operate it. What artificial intelligence allows us to do is to maybe abstract that further, maybe at least compared to systems we have now—fully remove that metaphor because the system can be so much more human than current computer systems are.

JA: Yeah, I totally understand what you're trying to say Will, and I agree with it because if we try to think of how robots came into, you know, the system of people living here in this world, it's like the robots decreased how much work people do.

WN: Yeah.

JA: And it just made everything easier. So when it comes to artificial intelligence, I feel like within the process of resettlement, it's really helpful because the people working on that program or, you know, that side, they're really working hard and they have so many things to complete each day. So if they can provide it to the artificial intelligence, I feel like it's helping them to finish the job quicker and easier.

WN: Yeah, it seems like if you look at the recent history of computational advances, big ones at least, new technologies that make it so that we have to do less work generally don't mean that we do less work and we're lazy. Suddenly, they usually mean that we end up doing a lot more work that's higher quality than it was before. So we don't have less things that we'll end up doing, we'll just do more things of higher quality.

When it comes to AI, I think it's very helpful to the clients because like I said before, it's making the job easier and we can just see so many things that agencies can create that can make their job easier using AI, you know, and they're not creating that so they can just help themselves. They're creating that to help clients as well. So I just think that it's very beneficial to the clients. For example, when it comes to languages, someone may not be able to speak 16 languages, but AI will be able to do that. So you can see how powerful AI is becoming with that itself, and agencies can definitely rely on that to make their job easier and more supportive to the clients.

What's an example of how we might apply artificial intelligence?

WN: So I guess one example that comes to mind would be caseworkers within most agencies, they're not available 24/7. I hope they're not available 24/7 in most, in any agency. But what that means is that there are times when a client might have a question and there's nobody there to answer it for them. Maybe you train an AI model to have a basic understanding of what a caseworker does and what sort of answers they would give. You take that model and then you try to use that to give clients 24-hour access to something that they only had access to during working hours before.

JA: Yeah, I agree with you, Will, on that because if we really think of like, for example, the case worker that you were talking about, they really want to help. They're really passionate with what they're doing to their clients, but they cannot really serve as much because what they're doing requires strength. What they're doing requires, like, their brain working, and it's just like after eight hours, you really, you are really exhausted. Now, give what they did to an AI, infinity. You know, AI will keep doing it and it will keep, it will keep going until you tell it stop. That's when it's going to stop. So that ability is something that I can see, let's say, caseworkers, if they choose to work with that, it's going to really improve how much clients are receiving services within the organization, you know? So I think definitely AI is something that everyone should consider as helpful.

WN: Yeah, I think you've hit on a really good point because the AI doesn't have—no AI system has emotions to it. That can be good for a situation where you want very cold stuff, but from what I've seen of the client-caseworker interaction so far is it's very, there's an ethic of care there that is super, super important. And so what that means with AI is it's not going to take over from those caseworkers because it can't take over from those caseworkers because that emotion isn't there. But it can definitely extend that system, and I think that's important. It's helpful.

JA: Yeah, that's totally really important that you mentioned that AI cannot go over what caseworkers do, and I really agree with that—because of what caseworkers are going to do, based on what clients are receiving. I can say, for example, AI will never control someone like a caseworker, but a caseworker can control what AI is going to do, and that itself is going to decrease how much they get tired because the caseworker is the one who knows, okay, I'm able to do this and this and this, so the rest, I'm sure AI can help me. So AI, here it is, take it, you know, and that is just going to be beneficial to everyone.

What about privacy and security concerns?

WN: Yeah, I mean, I don't think there's any difference between us using these technologies and expecting them to be secure and private than there is from a newly arrived refugee using these technologies. They should expect the same things. I think it's as simple as that.

JA: Yeah. And it's a normal feeling to feel the way we are feeling because we all fear for our safety, you know, we don't want anything bad to happen to us. So there is not really something unique between us and new arrivals like refugees because we are all human, and what I will be afraid of is the same thing that a refugee can be afraid of. But the point here is to understand boundaries of what is supposed to be shared and what is not supposed to be shared. At least we should have that option of allowing AI to—okay, this is, I'm allowing you to share it. Now if you allow it, it's on you. It's not on AI anymore. So I feel like people should have that freedom to allow what they should release and what they shouldn't. Yeah.

What about truthfulness and accuracy concerns?

WN: Yeah. I don't know. I think the way I've been looking at language models right now is it feels to me like a human that was raised entirely on the internet and nothing else. They never saw the real world. They only saw every single thing that's on the internet right now. And so you know, it can understand speech and what it means to talk to somebody and understand the context of a conversation, but it doesn't know what's true and what's not true because it grew up entirely on the internet. What makes that so dangerous for clients, I think, is that it's—if you have a system that is capable of magically speaking every single language on earth basically, it instantly gives this sort of like superiority complex in the mind of the person interacting with it that makes you trust it in a way that you probably shouldn't. And so the idea, the problem of understanding, the problem of figuring out how you use something that's this useful while also reminding people constantly of how valuable it is, is a really complicated and difficult thing that I don't think anybody has really figured out quite yet in its full.

JA: Yeah. That's a very good point. And I also feel like as people interact with AI, they need to be more careful and use their ability to think, because we don't want to fully rely on AI. The reason why I'm saying this is because it's us, people who created AI.

WN: Yeah, yeah, I think there's an ethical requirement that resettlement agencies act as a buffer between these systems and the truth, if that makes sense. They need—resettlement agencies need to make sure that the things that are getting to clients are pretty much fully factually correct. And so doing that with AI is complicated.

JA: Yeah. It is very complicated doing that with the AI because now you need to redo the work AI did and understand. It's like you are the bridge now between AI and the client trying to tell AI, okay, you are not passing here because if you pass here, my client will be confused. So stay there. Okay, you can pass. It's like you know what to allow the client to hear or see and what to stop. And I feel like that itself to me is still beneficial because it's decreasing how much it some people are working here and it's making the process faster. So if that would be the only thing people working in the resettlement agencies focusing on, I feel like our clients will really benefit more because they feel safe. It's not that they're just receiving something that was not checked. They're receiving something that is checked and for that reason, they should really feel safe because it's not everyone who's receiving what they're getting basically. Yeah.

WN: Yeah. Yeah. That's a good way of looking at it.

Conclusion

MM: As this conversation entails, the parameters or ethics that AI can be integrated in the resettlement process is now very different than any other scenario, where the privacy of the individuals is at the forefront and the use of it should be in an assembly where humans are at the crucial steps to fact check the information and relate to clients. With its existing integration, there's no shortage on how it can help caseworkers as long as it plays as an assistant and not the lead in the crucial human process.

The IRC received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #90RB0052 and Grant #90RB0053. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.