

From Green Bird to Grey Area: Open-Source Learning in the Age of AI Uncertainty

By Vivian O



Figure 1: Duo, the Green Owl Mascot, Is Always Watching.¹

When Duolingo officially announced its transition to an “AI-first” strategy in 2025, the company framed the shift as a leap forward towards innovation, suggesting there will be smarter, faster, and more personalized learning through generative AI tutors and predictive models. But

¹ “A Duolingo Review,” blog post, The Linguist, June 15, 2024, <https://blog.thelinguist.com/duolingo-review/>.

for many users, the update marked something else entirely: a loss of trust, transparency, and the personalized, gamified experience that had made the platform so beloved in the first place. As algorithms quietly replaced community features and design decisions became harder to trace, a wave of backlash began to build. In online forums, blog posts, and GitHub repos, frustrated learners started seeking out or even building their own alternatives.

Open-source platforms, such as LibreLingo, Lingonaut, Tatoeba, Anki, and Apertium, gained traction not necessarily because they were more advanced, but because they promised something proprietary AI-first platforms had abandoned: transparency, user control, and community-driven learning. These tools reject the logic of optimization at all costs and instead center collective participation, ethical design, and open access. In this growing migration away from corporate edtech lies a deeper cultural crisis:

What values are being embedded in our educational technologies? Who gets to decide how we learn, and for whom are these systems and technological advances truly designed for?

This article aims to explore and analyze how the rise of open-source education platforms represents more than just technical alternatives to AI-driven apps. Rather, it acutely signals an urgent cultural and ethical resistance to the commodification of learning. In response to the growing numbers of proprietary AI infrastructures on popular platforms, these open source alternatives model a different vision of what education can be: collaborative, transparent, and human-centered.