Teaching Cognate Languages in Secondary Education: A Case Study on a Norwegian Language Summer School

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This paper examines the pedagogical potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching cognate foreign languages, focusing on the acquisition of Norwegian by secondary-level learners (ages 11–16) who already possess a solid foundation in English (intermediate to upper-intermediate – B1/B2) and an elementary to intermediate level (A2–B1). Based on classroom insights from a 2021 Norwegian summer school, the paper explores how AI can enhance cognate-based language instruction, support cross-linguistic transfer, and deepen intercultural competence in both lower and upper secondary education.

Cognate languages such as English, German, and Norwegian and other Germanic languages share numerous lexical, syntactic, and morphological similarities. From a didactic standpoint, these connections offer an almost ideal entry point into the acquisition of a third foreign language. AI tools can assist learners in making meaningful linguistic comparisons, promoting noticing, pattern recognition, and language awareness. It is recommendable, based on direct teaching experience, to use AI as a reflective learning support that helps learners uncover connections between related lexical items (cognates) and shared or divergent grammatical structures across the three languages.

This paper is grounded in principles from plurilingual education, contrastive didactics, and task-based language teaching (TBLT). It aligns with CEFR descriptors related to language awareness, plurilingual competence, and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). It promotes guided AI use to support both receptive and productive skills, as well as critical cultural engagement. Classroom-recommended strategies include: using ChatGPT to generate contrastive dialogues or prompts in English, German, and Norwegian that highlight structural transfer points; employing DeepL or Reverso to conduct parallel translation tasks, helping students identify true and false cognates, word order patterns, and sentence structure rules; creating AI-assisted lexical comparison grids, where learners sort AI-suggested vocabulary into cognate and non-cognate categories and assigning reflection tasks where students analyze how AI tools reflect cultural perspectives across the three linguistic contexts.

The article also discusses how AI can support homework and autonomous learning, such as generating grammar explanation prompts in English and comparing them to AI-generated equivalents in German and Norwegian, or using conversational bots to practice oral skills with immediate lexical and syntactic feedback.

AI-mediated learning; plurilingual competence development; cross-linguistic transfer; cognate awareness; intercultural communication; artificial intelligence in language teaching.

1. Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages in secondary education is currently undergoing a significant transformation as a result of the integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI). AI-based tools have shown considerable potential to enhance language learning, particularly in contexts where learners are acquiring multiple languages from the same or related linguistic families. Cognate languages—languages that share common lexical, syntactic, and morphological features—offer a unique opportunity for leveraging cross-linguistic transfer and fostering plurilingual competence among students. In European secondary education contexts, English and German often form the foundation for learning additional languages, such as Norwegian, enabling learners to capitalize on cognate connections to accelerate acquisition and deepen linguistic awareness.

Despite growing interest in AI-assisted language instruction, research examining its practical integration in classroom settings, particularly for cognate languages, remains limited. Existing studies emphasize AI's potential in generating adaptive exercises, facilitating pattern recognition, and providing immediate feedback, yet empirical evidence from real classroom applications is scarce. This gap is particularly evident in secondary education, where learners are at a critical stage for developing both receptive and productive skills, as well as the intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

This study investigates the pedagogical potential of AI in teaching cognate foreign languages, focusing on the acquisition of Norwegian by secondary-level learners aged 11–16, who possess intermediate proficiency in English (B1) and elementary to beginner-level German (A1–A2). Drawing on insights from a 2021 Norwegian summer school, the research examines how AI can support cross-linguistic transfer, enhance learner awareness of cognates and grammatical structures, and strengthen intercultural understanding. The study further explores practical strategies for integrating AI into classroom activities, highlighting opportunities to augment traditional teaching methods with AI-assisted exercises.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to evaluate how cognate-based instruction can be optimized through AI integration; (2) to identify specific classroom applications that enhance linguistic and cultural competence; and (3) to discuss potential limitations and propose strategies for mitigating challenges associated with AI use in secondary education. By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to the growing discourse on AI-assisted language education and offers practical insights for teachers and researchers seeking to implement technology-assisted plurilingual instruction.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Plurilingual Education Principles

The concept of plurilingual education, as defined by the Council of Europe (2001), emphasizes the integration of learners' linguistic repertoires rather than treating languages

as isolated systems. This approach encourages learners to mobilize their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge when acquiring new languages, developing what the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* defines as *plurilingual and pluricultural competence* (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 24–27). The theoretical foundation of this study aligns with this perspective, framing the use of AI tools as an instrument that can enhance learners' awareness of cross-linguistic similarities and differences.

Beacco et al. (2016) argue that plurilingual education fosters the capacity to navigate and mediate between linguistic systems, reinforcing intercultural communication and reflection. Similarly, van Lier (1996) emphasizes that language learning should not only focus on linguistic accuracy but also on awareness and authenticity in interaction. Within this paradigm, the integration of artificial intelligence can be seen as a natural extension of a pedagogical shift toward learner autonomy and metalinguistic reflection (Benson, 2011, pp. 58–60).

2.2 Contrastive Didactics and Cross-Linguistic Influence

Contrastive didactics provides a valuable framework for understanding how learners transfer knowledge between related languages. Research on cross-linguistic influence (Ringbom, 2007, pp. 88–90) demonstrates that cognate recognition and structural similarities between related languages, such as English, German, and Norwegian, facilitate positive transfer and reduce cognitive load in the acquisition of additional languages. Viberg (2009) and Ringbom (2007) both highlight the lexical and semantic advantages that learners gain when identifying and exploiting interlingual similarities, particularly in the early stages of third-language (L3) acquisition.

From a psycholinguistic standpoint, these similarities allow learners to build on their existing mental lexicon, accelerating comprehension and production. Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis further supports the idea that conscious attention to form is crucial in developing interlanguage competence. The role of AI tools—such as ChatGPT, DeepL, and Reverso—is particularly relevant here, as they can generate contrastive examples, highlight morphological and syntactic correspondences, and guide learners toward noticing relevant patterns across cognate languages.

2.3 Cognitive Load and Task Design

Within cognitive learning theory, Sweller (1988) explains that excessive cognitive load can impede learning by overburdening working memory. However, when tasks are structured around familiar linguistic patterns, learners can allocate more mental resources to acquiring new structures rather than decoding form. Skehan (1998, pp. 103–104) supports this view, proposing that task complexity and linguistic familiarity should be balanced to optimize learning efficiency.

The author argues that AI can assist teachers in this balancing act by automatically generating graded tasks based on learners' proficiency levels, a principle consistent with

the CEFR's can-do descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 108). For example, ChatGPT or Praktika.ai can be used to produce assisted dialogues, where learners compare equivalent structures in English, German, and Norwegian, thus reducing extraneous load while increasing engagement.

2.4 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and AI Mediation

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has long been recognized as an effective approach to developing communicative competence by integrating real-world tasks and learner interaction (Cameron, 2001, pp. 66–67; Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 93). AI-enhanced TBLT environments allow for dynamic adaptation of tasks, immediate feedback, and increased learner agency. For instance, Godwin-Jones (2023) notes that AI-driven platforms can personalize task input, support pronunciation and fluency monitoring, and simulate authentic communication scenarios.

The integration of AI into TBLT also aligns with principles of autonomous learning (Benson, 2011) and reflective noticing (Schmidt, 1990). Through guided prompts or AI-generated scenarios, learners can explore linguistic similarities across cognate languages, fostering both metalinguistic awareness and intercultural sensitivity. Such AI-supported mediation can transform contrastive tasks—traditionally static into adaptive, interactive, and context-sensitive learning experiences.

2.5. AI and the Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) forms a central pillar of plurilingual education. According to Beacco et al. (2016), ICC involves the ability to interpret, relate, and mediate cultural meanings across languages. In the context of AI-assisted language learning, platforms such as Praktika.ai now integrate cultural simulation features that expose learners to pragmatically and culturally varied dialogue situations (Praktika.ai, 2025). This supports the development of intercultural awareness through personalized, scenario-based practice.

At the same time, ethical considerations, such as algorithmic bias and data privacy, remain crucial in ensuring that AI-driven education supports inclusive and equitable learning environments (Noble, 2018, pp. 77–79; Council of Europe, 2023; European Commission, 2016). The author thus advocates for a reflective and critical approach to AI use, where technology serves as a facilitator of linguistic and cultural insight and not merely as an efficiency tool.

3. Case Study: The "Flink i norsk" Summer School (Iași, 2021)

3.1 Context and Participant Profile

The case study is based on a two-week summer school titled *Flink i norsk*, organized in Iași, Romania, in July 2021. The program introduced Norwegian as a new foreign

language to secondary school learners aged 11–16, most of whom already possessed a solid foundation in English and varying degrees of competence in German. The class size fluctuated between eight and ten participants, depending on attendance.

Students' proficiency levels were classified according to CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 24–27): English ranged from B1 to B2 (intermediate to upper-intermediate), while German ranged from A1 to A2 or beginner levels. Norwegian was introduced as a third language (L3), making the course an ideal setting to explore cognate-based transfer within the Germanic language family.

3.2 Instructional Design and Rationale

The activities implemented in the 2021 program were conducted without the direct assistance of AI technologies. However, their design anticipated principles that could later be amplified by AI-supported scaffolding, as theorized by Levy and Stockwell (2006) and Chapelle (2001). The author designed the course to promote cross-linguistic noticing and plurilingual awareness, focusing on lexical and structural similarities between English, German, and Norwegian (Ringbom, 2007, pp. 88–89).

Tasks combined visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements to support multimodal engagement (Cameron, 2001, pp. 66–67). According to TBLT principles (Lightbown & Spada, 2013), each activity aimed to activate communicative competence through meaning-oriented interaction rather than mechanical drilling.

3.3 Examples of Classroom Activities

Three main task types were employed throughout the summer school:

1. **Cognate Identification Games:** Using platforms such as Baamboozle, Kahoot and Quizizz, learners identified correct Norwegian cognates based on English or German prompts. For example, when presented with a German or English word, students selected its Norwegian equivalent from multiple-choice options. These tasks promoted awareness of lexical families and highlighted both "true" and "false" cognates (Viberg, 2009).
2. **Gap-Filling Exercises:** Learners completed short sentences in Norwegian using cognate cues provided in English. Sometimes, the English word was placed in parentheses, and students were asked to recall or infer the Norwegian form. This technique supported noticing (Schmidt, 1990) and reinforced form-meaning mapping, contributing to a deeper understanding of morphological patterns.
3. **Movement and Music-Based Cognate Sorting:** In a more kinesthetic task, students physically responded—standing up, sitting down, or moving—when encountering "intruder" words from the third language in a sequence of bilingual cognates. For example, in a string of English-German pairs, a

Norwegian cognate might appear as an "intruder." These activities encouraged quick lexical recognition, pattern awareness, and playful engagement.

3.4 Observations and Learner Outcomes

Qualitative observations and short reflective discussions revealed several recurring outcomes. Students recognized cognates more rapidly as the course progressed and became increasingly aware of grammatical differences among the three languages. Learners also displayed greater confidence in oral expression, even when their grammatical control remained limited—confirming previous findings that lexical familiarity accelerates communicative readiness (Ringbom, 2007; Skehan, 1998).

The results indicate that cognate-based instruction enhances both receptive and productive skills, particularly when reinforced through cross-linguistic comparison. As Sweller (1988) and Skehan (1998) suggest, task familiarity can reduce the cognitive load and promote learning more efficiently. These effects were clearly observable in the students' growing ability to hypothesize and self-correct linguistic forms across the three languages.

3.5 Potential AI Enhancement

Although the original summer school activities were not AI-assisted, their structure lends itself naturally to AI integration. Tools such as ChatGPT, DeepL, and Praktika.ai could be used to expand and individualize similar learning tasks. ChatGPT, for instance, can generate contrastive dialogues or translation prompts across English, German, and Norwegian, enabling learners to explore morphological and syntactic parallels.

DeepL or Reverso could support reflective translation exercises, helping students identify true and false cognates and discover cross-linguistic regularities (Moorkens, 2022).

Furthermore, Praktika.ai offers AI-driven speech feedback and cultural simulation features that could extend learners' exposure to authentic pronunciation and intercultural contexts (Praktika.ai, 2025). Through these tools, AI would not replace instruction but rather enrich it—providing personalized feedback, adaptive scaffolding, and increased learner autonomy (Godwin-Jones, 2023).

3.6 Implications

The *Flink i norsk* case study illustrates that cognate-based instruction is particularly effective when learners have existing proficiency in related languages. The use of AI can strengthen this effect by providing immediate corrective input and expanded opportunities for autonomous practice. The author argues that integrating AI tools within such cognate frameworks can promote *plurilingual awareness* and *metacognitive reflection* (Benson, 2011; Beacco et al., 2016), developing both linguistic and intercultural competence.

4. Pedagogical Applications

4.1. AI as a Reflective Learning Support

The pedagogical rationale for integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into the teaching of cognate languages lies in its capacity to enhance noticing, pattern recognition, and language awareness. Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis underscores that learners must consciously attend to linguistic forms in order to internalize them. In the context of teaching cognate languages such as English, German, and Norwegian, AI tools can serve as reflective mediators, helping students recognize systematic relationships between lexical and grammatical patterns (Ringbom, 2007; Viberg, 2009).

AI-driven tools such as ChatGPT, DeepL, Reverso, and Praktika.ai can generate dynamic linguistic comparisons, suggest contrastive examples, and support metalinguistic reflection. For example, ChatGPT can prompt learners with tri-lingual sentence sets highlighting similarities and divergences in word order or morphology (Godwin-Jones, 2023). DeepL or Reverso can provide aligned translations that learners analyze collaboratively, distinguishing between true and false cognates, semantic shifts and idiomatic divergences (Moorkens, 2022).

These tools thus promote plurilingual awareness, a key objective in the Council of Europe's framework (Beacco et al., 2016)—while fostering learner autonomy through guided discovery and self-regulated exploration (Benson, 2011).

4.2 AI-Assisted Task Design

AI-based systems can substantially enrich *Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)* environments by offering adaptive and personalized scaffolding. In alignment with Levy and Stockwell's (2006) view of computer-assisted language learning as a continuum between automation and interaction, AI can serve both formative and creative functions.

The author recommends using ChatGPT to automatically generate contrastive dialogues across English, German, and Norwegian that emphasize structural transfer points. For example, students can be prompted to complete or rephrase sentences produced by AI, focusing on syntax differences (e.g., verb position, definite article usage). According to Skehan (1998, pp. 103–104), such contrastive, cognitively challenging tasks enhance linguistic complexity and depth of processing while maintaining communicative purpose.

Similarly, DeepL and Reverso can be used for parallel translation tasks, enabling students to align and compare sentences across the three languages. This facilitates awareness of interlingual variation while keeping cognitive load within manageable limits (Sweller, 1988). AI feedback helps identify systematic errors and provides explanations in accessible language, thus supporting differentiated learning (Chapelle, 2001).

4.3. Lexical Comparison and Categorization Tasks

AI can also assist in building AI-generated lexical comparison grids, where learners are presented with lists of potential cognates and asked to categorize them as true cognates, false cognates, or non-cognates. ChatGPT can generate such lists automatically, including distractors and contextual examples. Learners then reflect on observed patterns, discussing which features—orthographic, phonological, or semantic—indicate cognate status (Ringbom, 2007).

These reflective categorization tasks can be gamified through quiz-style interfaces like Kahoot or Baamboozle, maintaining the original classroom model while adding real-time AI adaptation. When implemented with Praktika.ai or similar voice-interactive systems, the same tasks can also train pronunciation and receptive listening skills (Praktika.ai, 2025).

4.4. Homework and Autonomous Learning with AI

AI tools can extend classroom learning into the home environment, promoting learner autonomy (Benson, 2011). For example, students can use ChatGPT to generate personalized grammar explanations in English and then compare them to Norwegian or German equivalents produced by AI. Such exercises deepen metalinguistic awareness and reinforce the contrastive analysis approach.

Praktika.ai's conversational mode enables oral skill development outside class, allowing students to practice target language dialogues while receiving immediate feedback on pronunciation, lexical choice, and grammatical accuracy. This aligns with the learner autonomy and interactional authenticity principles highlighted by van Lier (1996).

In addition, AI systems can offer adaptive feedback loops, tailoring corrective input to each learner's pace and proficiency. Godwin-Jones (2023) emphasizes that this adaptability makes AI particularly valuable in mixed-level classrooms, where students' language profiles differ across multiple foreign languages.

4.5. Intercultural and Ethical Dimensions

In addition to linguistic benefits, AI tools can facilitate the development of *intercultural communicative competence (ICC)* by embedding cultural context into language practice. Through scenario-based simulations in Praktika.ai or AI-generated dialogues in ChatGPT, learners can explore social norms, politeness conventions, and idiomatic expressions across English-, German-, and Norwegian-speaking cultures (Beacco et al., 2016).

However, as Noble (2018, pp. 77–79) and the Council of Europe (2023) caution, educators must ensure that such AI-mediated experiences are implemented ethically, avoiding biases and preserving learner privacy in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (European Commission, 2016). The pedagogical model should therefore balance innovation with critical digital literacy, ensuring learners not only use AI effectively but also understand its implications.

5. Challenges and Limitations

5.1. Technological and Infrastructure Barriers

Although the pedagogical benefits of AI integration are clear, practical implementation in schools often faces significant technological and infrastructural constraints. As van der Zanden (2024) highlights, disparities in access to digital tools, internet connectivity, and institutional resources can limit the scalability of AI-enhanced language instruction. In secondary education contexts, particularly in less digitally advanced regions, teachers may lack both the hardware and training necessary to integrate AI meaningfully into daily instruction.

This "digital divide" may exacerbate existing inequalities between learners who have regular access to AI platforms (e.g., ChatGPT, DeepL, Praktika.ai) and those who do not. The Council of Europe (2023) underscores the need for inclusive digital policies that guarantee equitable access to educational technology, emphasizing that innovation should not deepen existing socio-economic gaps.

5.2. Teacher Preparedness and Pedagogical Training

One major limitation lies in teachers' readiness to use AI pedagogically rather than merely as a technical aid. Many educators remain uncertain about how to design AI-assisted tasks that align with curriculum objectives and maintain cognitive depth. Levy and Stockwell (2006) point out that the pedagogical value of technology depends less on the tool itself than on its integration into a coherent learning design. Furthermore, as Chapelle (2001) and Reinders and White (2023) emphasize, successful AI-enhanced instruction requires explicit teacher training in computational literacy, data interpretation, and ethical use. Without this preparation, teachers risk delegating too much of the learning process to AI, potentially reducing learners' metacognitive engagement.

Professional development programs are therefore essential to ensure teachers can interpret AI-generated feedback, critically evaluate output accuracy, and guide students toward reflective learning (Godwin-Jones, 2023).

5.3. Overreliance and Cognitive Implications

Another pedagogical challenge involves learners' possible overreliance on AI-generated answers. When learners consistently depend on AI for translation, grammar correction, or lexical choice, they may bypass essential processes of cognitive struggle and hypothesis testing (Skehan, 1998; Sweller, 1988). This could limit the development of procedural knowledge and long-term retention.

Benson (2011) warns that autonomy does not imply independence from guidance; instead, it requires a balance between learner initiative and teacher mediation. In AI-assisted learning, this balance must be carefully maintained to ensure that learners use AI as a reflective companion rather than a replacement for cognitive engagement.

AI should therefore be framed as a metacognitive tool—an assistant that prompts reflection and pattern recognition—rather than a direct source of linguistic truth. Teachers

must design activities where AI output becomes material for analysis and discussion, not passive consumption.

5.4. Data Ethics, Privacy, and Algorithmic Bias

Ethical concerns form another major limitation of AI in education. According to Noble (2018), algorithms are not neutral; they reflect the cultural and linguistic biases embedded in their training data. In language learning, this may result in the reinforcement of dominant cultural norms or the marginalization of minority language varieties.

Institutions must also comply with the *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* (European Commission, 2016), which governs the collection and storage of personal data, including voice and text input in AI platforms. The Council of Europe (2023) advocates for transparent data management, particularly in educational contexts involving minors.

In addition, as Godwin-Jones (2023) and Moorkens (2022) observe, AI systems such as DeepL and Reverso often rely on large-scale corpora whose content may not always be pedagogically or culturally appropriate. Teachers must therefore curate and contextualize AI output to prevent uncritical reproduction of biased or inaccurate material.

5.5. Pedagogical Constraints and Institutional Resistance

From an institutional perspective, curriculum alignment and administrative approval can pose additional challenges. Traditional curricula, particularly in public education systems, may not easily accommodate experimental AI-enhanced modules. As Skehan (1998) and Cameron (2001) note, pedagogical innovation often requires systemic support, including curriculum flexibility, access to training resources, and continuous assessment tools.

Resistance may also come from educators unfamiliar with AI or concerned about its potential to undermine their role. Addressing these concerns requires clear communication of AI's purpose as a supportive, not substitutive, component of instruction—an idea echoed by Beacco et al. (2016) in their emphasis on the teacher's central mediating role in plurilingual education.

5.6. Sustainability and Long-Term Integration

Finally, long-term sustainability remains a key limitation. AI platforms evolve rapidly, and maintaining consistent pedagogical frameworks requires ongoing adaptation. Teachers and institutions must anticipate version updates, subscription costs, and evolving privacy policies. As Levy and Stockwell (2006) note, CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) initiatives frequently fail when they depend on external funding or proprietary systems that become obsolete.

A sustainable model would therefore emphasize open-access AI tools, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous teacher training. As Reinders and White (2023) argue, sustainable integration depends on cultivating "AI literacy" among both teachers and learners—an understanding of how AI functions, where it can fail, and how it can be used ethically and creatively.

6. Conclusion

AI-based tools can strengthen the pedagogical potential of cognate language instruction by uniting reflective, communicative, and intercultural dimensions. The challenge lies not in the technology itself, but in how it is pedagogically framed and ethically integrated into plurilingual learning environments. While AI offers transformative potential for cognate-based language learning, its implementation must address practical, cognitive, ethical, and institutional challenges. The author argues for a model that emphasizes teacher mediation, learner reflection, and ethical responsibility, ensuring that AI remains a tool for enhancement rather than substitution in language learning.

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