

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR AI-MEDIATED INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRAK

Tren yang berkembang pesat dalam kecerdasan buatan (AI), dan khususnya dalam AI generatif dan model bahasa besar, telah secara dramatis mengubah pemahaman modern tentang pengajaran bahasa asing. Penelitian sebelumnya sebagian besar telah menyelidiki penerapan AI untuk pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, masih terdapat kurangnya perhatian terhadap konsekuensi teoretis dari pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang dibantu AI terhadap kompetensi komunikatif antarbudaya (ICC) dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing kedua (L2/L3). Dengan menggunakan teori Tempat Ketiga yang dikemukakan oleh Bhabha dan dikembangkan lebih lanjut oleh Kramsch, artikel ini membangun kerangka kerja teoretis tentang pengembangan kompetensi antarbudaya yang dimediasi oleh AI dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa asing kedua. Dalam makalah ini, konsep AI telah dikonseptualisasikan sebagai variabel mediasi yang memungkinkan proses negosiasi berkelanjutan antara budaya asli (C1), budaya sasaran (C2), dan makna hibrida budaya pembelajar di Tempat Ketiga, alih-alih melihatnya sebagai perangkat teknologi. Dengan bantuan sintesis teoretis dari tinjauan dan analisis literatur, makalah ini menghipotesiskan kerangka kerja konseptual yang menunjukkan bagaimana pengaturan pembelajaran yang dibantu AI dapat digunakan untuk meningkatkan kesadaran antarbudaya, pemikiran kritis, dan strategi komunikasi adaptif. Makalah ini mengemukakan argumen bahwa AI, dalam kontekstualisasi Ruang Ketiga yang dimotivasi secara pedagogis, dapat membentuk kembali pembelajaran bahasa kedua sebagai proses berbasis keterampilan menjadi aktivitas pembelajaran bahasa yang sadar budaya dan membentuk identitas.

Kata Kunci: Kecerdasan Buatan (AI), Teori Ruang Ketiga (Third Place Theory), Kompetensi Komunikatif Antarbudaya (ICC), Pendidikan Bahasa yang Dimediasi oleh Kecerdasan Buatan (AI).

ABSTRACT

A fast-growing trend in artificial intelligence (AI), and especially in generative AI and large language models, has dramatically changed the modern understanding of foreign language teaching. Although previous studies have already largely investigated the application of AI to English learning, there has been relative lack of attention to the theoretical consequences of AI assisted English learning to intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of a second foreign language (L2/L3) learning. Using the theory of the Third Place suggested by Bhabha and developed further by Kramsch, this article builds a theoretical framework of the intercultural competence development mediated by AI in the setting of second foreign language learning. In this paper, the concept of AI has been conceptualized as a mediating variable that enables the ongoing negotiation process between the native culture (C1), target culture (C2), and cultural hybrid meanings of learners in the Third Place rather than seeing it as a technological device. With the help of a theoretical synthesis of literature review and analysis, this paper hypothesizes



a conceptual framework demonstrating how AI-assisted learning settings may be used to promote intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and adaptive communication strategies. This paper proposes an argument that AI, in a pedagogically motivated contextualization of the Third Place, can reshape the second language learning as the skill-based process to become the culturally conscious and identity-constitutive activity of language learning.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence (AI), Third Place Theory, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), AI-Mediated Language Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been introduced into the field of foreign language teaching and has become one of the most significant changes in applied linguistics in the last ten years. Recent progress in natural language processing, speech recognition, and generative large language models has made AI-driven applications offer personalized feedback, interactive text chat, and adaptive learning vectors to language learners (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Chen et al., 2020). Although the same technologies have been extensively debated in terms of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL), their theoretical implications to the study of the second foreign language learning, especially in cases of non-English and multilingual education, have not been thoroughly discussed (Shadiev & Yang, 2020, Buddha et al., 2024).

Second foreign language learners are also likely to encounter some unique difficulties as compared to primary foreign language learners, such as lesser exposure frequency, less time of instruction, and lower instrumental motivation. The intercultural factors also make these challenges more complicated as learners have to deal not only with linguistic constructions, but cultural meanings which are significantly different to the cultural systems they have used before. In this sense, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been identified as one of the core objectives of the modern foreign language teaching (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Nevertheless, most conventional teaching models are inclined to perceive culture as a fixed body of knowledge that is related to the target language community, thus, supporting binary oppositions between the native and the target cultures.

The “Third Place” theory can offers a critical alternative to such dichotomous perspectives. Ray Oldenburg (1989) coined the concept of the Third Place which referred to a place or community environment that was apart of home and work where people would meet and share information. Specifically, these are cafes, libraries, and parks. Oldenburg claimed that the Third Place is essential in terms of civil society, democracy, civic participation and community development. The application of the Third Place to language and culture education was seen by Claire Kramsch (1993), and the connection between the concept of the Third Place with the emerging intercultural communication competence was developed by Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet (1999) and furthered as the concept of the Hybrid Culture by the Third Space theory of Bhabha (1994). In this space, the learners do not passively acquire the target cultural norms and actively mediate meanings in the process of bridging the native culture (C1) and the target culture (C2).

It is on this theoretical backdrop that the current research will attempt to redefine the role of AI in second language learning in foreign language classrooms using the concept of the Third Place. Instead of presenting AI as an apolitical technological support or a replacement of a real teacher, the presented paper suggests that AI might serve as a mediating voice that enables intercultural dialog and rumination as well as adaptive sense-making. The proposed study by building a hypothetical framework, which combines AI-mediated learning and Third Place

pedagogy, seeks to lay conceptual groundwork in future studies and pedagogical innovation in second foreign language intercultural education.

Use of artificial intelligence in teaching a foreign language has grown at an incredible rate due to emergence of intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning systems and generative AI systems. The earliest researches on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) focused mostly on the practice through drills and automated feedback (Lee et al., 2025). Increased maturity in machine learning and natural language processing has moved AI-based language learning systems closer towards more interactive, adaptive, and learner-centered systems (Fountoulakis, 2024; Hubbard, 2021).

The current literature reflects the opportunity presented by AI to aid personalization of the learning process, feedback in real time, and autonomous learning development (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2022). Large language models such as ChatGPT have transformed language learning by enabling simulated conversations, contextualized language use, and human-like text generation, thereby creating more interactive learning experiences (Cai et al., 2023). Such affordances are the most useful with students of second foreign languages because in most cases they are not exposed to enough communication in the natural situation.

Nevertheless, a significant part of the literature available now is largely skills based, with the researchers being interested in the vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, or fluency (Chen et al., 2020). Cultural learning is often regarded as a peripheral advantage and not an instructional goal. Further, AI is usually discussed as a disinterested technological instrument, and little consideration is given to how it helps to mediate cultural meanings, identities, and power relationships inscribed in the use of language.

Such instrumental perception of AI is dangerous as it supports the technocentric concept of language education when efficiency and accuracy are valued more than critical reflection and intercultural awareness. Without a solid pedagogical framework, AI-assisted language learning, as a number of scholars have warned, may unconsciously popularize shallow cultural images or further increase the reliance of learners on the results of algorithms (Kramsch, 2014; Farrow, 2023). The mentioned limitations lead to the necessity of a more theoretically based solution that places AI in larger cultural and communicative paradigms. This imperative for a principled, human-centred theoretical grounding inevitably directs scholarly attention toward the established construct of intercultural communicative competence, which, though formulated decades before the proliferation of generative AI, offers precisely the kind of multidimensional and critically reflective framework that current AI-driven approaches conspicuously lack. It is not new that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is viewed as the major goal of foreign language learning within a growing globalized world. The conceptualization of ICC by Byram (2020) views it as attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) skills, as well as critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). This multi-dimensional model points to the importance of the fact that effective cross-cultural communication involves not only linguistic mastery, but also a broader set of interpretive, relational, and ethically engaged capacities that resist reduction to algorithmic output or performative accuracy.

The following models have also highlighted the process and dynamic nature of ICC. Nguyen (2026) reflects on ICC as a cyclic process, which entails attitudinal, knowledge, skills, and internal outcomes, resulting in effective and proper external communication. These paradigms emphasize the role of reflexivity, adaptation, and moral interaction in intercultural interactions. Nevertheless, traditional ICC models have been operationalized frequently in a classroom practice that still is culture-transmission focused, even though they have a rich



theoretical basis. Students are often placed as consumers of already existing cultural information related to the target language community but not as actors of cross-cultural meaning-making (Wang & Devitt, 2022). This trend is especially apparent in second language language teaching, in which the lack of instructional time promotes simplified and essentialized cultural images.

Within the framework of AI-mediated learning, ICC studies have started to examine the potential of digital space to provoke intercultural contact by using the virtual spaces of interaction, simulation, and multimedia materials (Gruber et al., 2023). Neglect of the epistemological presuppositions on which cultural learning is based, however, is common in these studies, as they tend to underline technological affordances. Consequently, the problem of the way AI-mediated environments could help to promote a higher level of intercultural reflection and identity formation is not thoroughly theorized.

The Third Place perspective is especially topical in the case of second foreign language education. The second foreign language can be taken by learners whose linguistic and intercultural experiences are already complex due to the influence of the first foreign language learning on the second language learning. The Third Place offers a theoretical perspective that explains this multiplicity, understanding learners as multilingual and multicultural subjects and not as subjects who lack non-native speakers.

However, the majority of the Third Place-based research is based on the traditional classroom setups. The consequences of digital and AI-mediated spaces on Third Place building have not been fully developed. Such a gap becomes much bigger when AI technologies play a more important role in mediating language learning interactions.

An analysis of the literature that is available shows that there are three gaps. First, the studies of AI-assisted language learning have been mainly focused on efficiency, customization, and skill-building and did not pay much attention to intercultural theory. Second, ICC models have yet to be modified adequately to mirror AI-mediated communicative conditions, in which the human-machine interaction makes antique concepts of intercultural dialogue complex. Third, despite the fact that the Third Place theory is a potent conceptual instrument to reconsider cultural learning, the application to the field of AI-based second foreign language education is not developed yet.

Such shortcomings imply that an integrative theoretical conceptualization of AI is necessary, which does not see it as a technological tool but as a mediating force in the Third Place. This framework has to deal with the way AI-mediated interactions can promote intercultural awareness, critical reflection, and adaptive communicative strategies without compromising agency in the hands of learners or their cultural specificities. Based on these findings, the current research paper suggests a theoretical approach to theorizing AI-based Third Place construction in learning a second foreign language. The next section discusses the methodological approach that was used in the development of this theoretical framework.

METHOD

The research design followed in this study is conceptual and theoretical research design, which aims to develop an integrative framework for interpreting AI-mediated intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in second foreign language learning. Unlike empirical research that collects and analyzes primary data, conceptual research operates by conjecturing new ideas, synthesizing existing theoretical perspectives, and formulating novel analytical models that can inform and guide subsequent empirical investigations.



The selection of this theoretical methodology is informed by two primary rationales. First, the rapid and continuous evolution of AI technologies renders empirical findings quickly outdated, whereas theoretical frameworks possess greater durability and longer applicability across shifting technological landscapes. Second, the pedagogical and ethical implications of integrating AI into language education require careful conceptualization prior to classroom implementation, as meaningful practice must be grounded in a coherent theoretical understanding of how AI operates within intercultural learning contexts.

Consequently, this study does not seek to quantify measurable learning outcomes or establish causal relationships through statistical means. Instead, it focuses on the theoretical positioning of AI within the field of intercultural language education, critically examining how AI tools can be understood as mediators of intercultural meaning-making, and exploring the conceptual conditions under which such technologies may facilitate or constrain the development of learners' ICC.

Analytical Framework and Theoretical Sources

The conceptual framework of this study is constructed through the systematic integration of three major theoretical strands: Third Space Theory, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), and Artificial Intelligence in Language Education. Based on Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity and Kramsch's (2020, 2023) application of the Third Space to language education, this paper theorizes intercultural learning as a multidirectional process of meaning negotiation as opposed to cultural assimilation. Existing frameworks of ICC (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006) offer the analytic categories on which to investigate the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness in AI-mediated learning contexts, while research on AI-assisted language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2022) has contributed to the study of AI as a mediator that can influence the patterns of interaction, feedback, and self-regulation of learners. Instead of analyzing them separately, this paper integrates them in order to investigate the way AI operates at the cross-sections between language, culture, and technology. It is possible to reconceptualize AI as a contributor to intercultural meaning-making, but not as a neutral instructional tool, using this integrative approach.

Conceptual Synthesis and Model Construction

The main methodological process used in the current research is conceptual synthesis, which is the articulation of the existing theories and finding the areas of meeting and contradiction and restructuring them into a logical analytical framework (Jabareen, 2009). The procedure is carried out in three phases. To begin with, the most important concepts of the Third Space theory, i.e., hybridity, negotiation, and identity construction, are abstracted and reformulated concerning digital learning purpose. Second, these ideas are correlated to ICC components to discuss how intercultural competence may be redefined in the context of AI mediation. Third, the AI is hypothetically the mediating agent that organizes the interaction, generates reflection, and extends the symbolic resources of learners. The result of this synthesis is a theoretical framework of AI-mediated Third Space learning, where AI assists in keeping in motion between C1 (native culture), C2 (target culture), and new hybrid meanings. This is a model that focuses more on the process rather than on the product and it places more importance on the interpretive agency and ethical engagement of the learners.

Analytical Dimensions

To operationalize the conceptual framework, this study identifies four analytical dimensions through which AI-mediated Third Space learning can be examined:

1. Mediation of Cultural Discourse

AI written texts and conversations are spaces in which cultural meanings are chosen, framed and recontextualized.

2. Dialogic Interaction and Reflexivity

Interaction with the assistance of AI allows the learners to utilize an iterative conversation, which prompts the self-reflection and perspective-taking.

3. Identity Negotiation

Through AI-mediated spaces, learners play around with voices, positions, and cultural selves, which helps to develop a hybrid intercultural self.

4. Ethical and Critical Awareness

Learning mediated by AI makes representation, bias, and authority questionable, and therefore, ethical reflection is a factor of intercultural competence.

These dimensions provide the analytical foundation for the theoretical findings presented in the following section.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This part is a more theoretically articulated description of the results and findings based on the conceptual framework proposed in this study. It is also necessary to underline the fact that the findings considered here are not the empirical results but the theoretical conclusions which have been created with the help of the synthesis of concepts and the analytical arguments. These results indicate that when used in the context of the Third Place, artificial intelligence (AI) transforms the formation of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in second foreign language acquisition.

AI as a Cultural Mediator in the Third Place

One of the main theoretical finding of the research is the transformational conceptualization of AI as a cultural mediator that exists in the Third Place. Conventional conceptualizations of the use of AI in language learning are generally inclined to believe it is a neutral device providing linguistic input, error correction, or individualized learning pathways (Fountoulakis, 2024; Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2022). Conversely, the Third Place view prefigures the symbolic and ideological aspects of mediation when it is emphasized that every discourse-human-generated or machine-generated- is culturally contingent (Kramsch, 2009).

In AI-mediated learning, AI systems never just convey forms of language, it participates in constructing the conditions of meaning negotiation. Artificially creating culturally infused responses, choosing specific discourse conventions, and placing emphasis on specific communicative norms, AI takes part in the building of intercultural meanings. This mediation is not deterministic but dialogic because learners decode, accept or redefine AI-generated discourse through their cultural repertoires.

Taking a Third Place perspective, this process will allow the learners to get past binary oppositions between native culture (C1) and target culture (C2). Rather, AI-mediated interaction becomes one of the places where hybrid meanings are formed during negotiation. This hybridity coincides with the belief of Bhabha (1994) that cultural meaning is never given out whole and complete but it is always created in-between. Theoretical implication is that with

the help of AI, the formation of the Third Place is possible because it maintains dialogic interactions that disrupt established cultural units.

Reconfiguration of Intercultural Discourse Resources

The second significant finding deals with restructuring the resources of intercultural discourse among learners. Intercultural competence is also strongly connected with access to a wide range of discursive practices such as genres, registers, communicative styles and stylistic devices (Byram, 1997). Such diversity is rarely exposed in traditional second foreign language classes because of the nature of instructional resources and time. A large number of such discourse resources are greatly extended with the aid of AI-mediated environments that grant learners access to a large variety of culturally embedded texts and simulated interactions. Notably, this growth is not quantitative only but qualitative. Based on the conversation in one interaction, AI-generated discourse can compare two or more cultural voices, thus encouraging learners to compare the interpretation.

According to the Third Place outlook, the worth of this exposure is not to accrue cultural knowledge but a chance to work at interpretation. During the process of learning, learners need to be active in understanding the plausibility, relevance, and ideological positioning of AI-generated information. Such an interpretive interaction promotes what Karakaş (2023) defines as a reciprocal meaning-making, which is a fundamental mechanism of intercultural learning. This theoretical discovery indicates that AI can be used to develop ICC through the restructuring of symbolic repertoires of learners. Instead of absorbing a single-minded conceptualization of the target culture, learners build the ability to maneuver between plurality and uncertainty—a skill that is being identified as the key element of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006).

Dialogic Reflexivity as a Core Mechanism

A third finding brings out dialogic reflexivity as a key process with which AI-mediated Third Places help foster intercultural competence. Reflexivity means the capability of learning to critically scrutinize their cultural presumptions compared to alternative ways of looking at things (Byram, 1997). The traditional pedagogy usually takes reflexivity as a mental ability that is hard to operationalize in the classroom. The interaction mediated by AI presents novel affordances to reflexive interaction. The dialogue of this kind allows learners to externalize their assumptions, offer alternative formulations, and review their interpretations in terms of new viewpoints. This dialog approach is associated with Vygotskian ideas of mediation, where the higher order thinking is formed through the mediated interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In the Third Place, reflexivity is not an individual practice but an interaction process. AI is also an interlocutor, which provokes learners to vocalize positions and experience difference, despite the lack of human interlocutors. The theoretical implication is that AI-mediated dialogue could support and maintain reflexivity, which is a more inherent part of ICC development and not a pedagogical option.

Identity Negotiation and Hybrid Subjectivity

The other important theoretical finding is regarding the identity negotiation mediated by AI-based Third Places. Intercultural communication cannot be discussed without questions regarding identity because the use of language implies establishing a relative position among other people (Kramsch, 2009). Language learners, especially the second foreign language learners, tend to have tension regarding their identity since they face various language and



cultural affinities. Environments mediated by AI offer a relatively low-risk space of identity exploration. Students are able to play with various communicative positions, voices, and cultural alignments without the direct social impact of a face-to-face interaction. In the light of the Third Place approach, this experimentation is contributing to the formation of hybrid subjectivity where learners would combine components of various cultural systems. The finding builds on the notion of the intercultural speaker by Kramsch (1997), where AI allows playing with identity. Instead of substituting human interaction, AI integrates it by providing more symbolic materials to use in constructing identity. The theoretical implication is that ICC development not only consists of obtaining skills and knowledge but also creating flexible and reflective sense of self.

Ethical Awareness and Critical Engagement with AI Discourse

Another theoretical observation focuses on the ethical aspect of intercultural learning mediated by AI. The large corpora that are employed to train AI systems are based on the prevailing cultural stories and power dynamics (Li & Zhang, 2024). As a result, generated AI discourse can reproduce stereotypes, marginalize voice of minority, or provide culturally biased interpretation. These constraints in the Third Place model are not technical drawbacks but openings to critical practice. It is proposed to the learners to doubt the power of AI-generated discourse and acknowledge its contingent and local character. This harsh view is consistent with the idea proposed by Byram (1997) about critical cultural awareness as another essential element of ICC. The theoretical value in this situation is that it redefines the concept of ethical awareness as a component of AI-mediated learning and not an external issue. Through critically looking at AI discourse, learners are able to develop epistemic humility and ethical responsibility-modalities that are critical to intercultural communication in digitally mediated societies.

Implications for Second Foreign Language Contexts

Lastly, these theoretical findings are especially important to second language foreign education. In contrast to English, second foreign languages do not receive a central place in the curricula and are not exposed to a great extent and have an instrumental value. Third Places facilitated by AI can overcome these limitations to some degree since they provide long-term intercultural interaction opportunities outside of the classroom. The third place model makes sure that such interaction does not degenerate into shallow simulation. Rather, it focuses on negotiating the meanings, reflexivity and ethical awareness as key pedagogical objectives. The theoretical implication is that AI can lead to the increased cultural richness of the second-foreign language acquisition, as long as it is incorporated into a critically informed system of pedagogy.

Summary of Theoretical Findings

The results of the present research prove that Third Places transformed by AI represent an effective conceptual framework that can be used to redefine intercultural communicative competence in learning a second foreign language. AI also acts as a mediator of culture, extends resources of discourse, aids dialogic reflexivity, helps negotiate identity and pre-empts ethical consciousness. The combination of these processes leads to the ongoing dynamic and human-centered conception of intercultural competence that is applicable to the specifics of digital communication.

Table 1. Theoretical Findings

Key Finding	Description of the Finding	Supporting Concepts	Theoretical Implications
AI as a Cultural Mediator in the Third Place	AI is reconceptualised not as a neutral tool, but as a cultural mediator that actively participates in constructing the conditions for meaning negotiation through culturally embedded responses and communicative norms.	1. Kramsch (2009) on the cultural contingency of discourse 2. Bhabha (1994) on hybridity and the "in-between" space of cultural meaning	AI facilitates the emergence of the Third Place by promoting dialogic interactions that transcend binary oppositions between C1 and C2, enabling the formation of hybrid meanings through negotiation.
Reconfiguration of Intercultural Discourse Resources	AI expands learners' access to a diverse range of discourse resources, including genres, registers, and communicative styles. This expansion is qualitative in nature, as AI-generated discourse can present multiple cultural voices within a single interaction.	1. Byram (1997) on discourse competence 2. Karakaş (2023) on reciprocal meaning-making	The value of this expansion lies not in cultural knowledge accumulation, but in providing opportunities for active interpretation and negotiation, which serve as foundational mechanisms for ICC development.
Dialogic Reflexivity as a Core Mechanism	AI-mediated environments enable learners to externalise their assumptions, receive alternative formulations, and critically revise their interpretations through sustained dialogue.	1. Vygotsky (1978) on mediation and higher-order thinking 2. Byram (1997) on critical reflexivity	Reflexivity is reconceptualised as an interactive and dialogic process, rather than an individual cognitive exercise. It becomes an integrated component of ICC, not merely a pedagogical option.
Identity Negotiation and Hybrid Subjectivity	AI-mediated spaces provide a low-risk environment for identity exploration, allowing learners to experiment with various communicative positions, voices, and cultural alignments.	1. Kramsch (1997, 2009) on the intercultural speaker and identity 2. Kramsch (2020, 2023) on symbolic dimensions of language	ICC development involves not only the acquisition of skills and knowledge, but also the construction of a flexible and reflective sense of self through symbolic manipulation afforded by AI.
Ethical Awareness and Critical Engagement with AI Discourse	AI-generated discourse may reproduce stereotypes, marginalise minority voices, or present culturally biased interpretations. Within the Third Place model, these limitations are	1. Byram (1997) on critical cultural awareness 2. Li and Zhang (2024) on bias in AI corpora	Ethical awareness is redefined as an intrinsic component of AI-mediated learning, fostering epistemic humility and ethical responsibility as essential dimensions of ICC.

reframed as opportunities
for critical practice.

Implications for
Second Foreign
Language
Contexts

AI can address curricular constraints and limited cultural exposure in second foreign language education (non-English) by providing sustained intercultural interactions beyond the classroom.

1. Kramsch (1993, 1997) on the Third Place
2. Fountoulakis (2024) on AI in language education

AI-facilitated Third Places can enrich the cultural dimensions of second foreign language learning, provided that they are integrated within a critically informed pedagogical framework.

Discussion

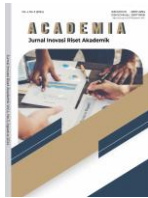
This discussion aims to elucidate, as well as critically place in context the theoretical results of this study in the larger academic discussion on artificial intelligence (AI), intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and second foreign language education. Instead of repeating the findings, this section explores their theoretical implications, conceptual novelty, and pedagogical consequences, and covers possible tensions and limitations associated with the AI-mediated intercultural learning.

From Instrumental Technology to Symbolic Mediation

One of the greatest contributions of the given study is the challenge to the current instrumental perception of AI in language education. A significant portion of the literature defines AI as the solution to the optimization of learning efficiency, a system of feedback automation, as well as the personalization of instruction (Fountoulakis, 2024; Zou et al, 2021). Although these functions represent pedagogical richness, they are based on a technocratic logic that threatens to subordinate the learning of language to a number of skills that can be measured. In comparison, the Third Place paradigm presupposes symbolic and cultural aspect of language use (Kramsch, 2009). In this respect, the interaction mediated by AI is not only a medium of linguistic input but a location of cultural representation, ideology positioning. The discussion, therefore, redeems AI as a symbolic negotiator, which determines the ways in which cultural meanings are made, negotiated, and disputed. Such a reconceptualization is consistent with the larger criticism in the applied linguistics field that warns against de-politicizing language education in online spaces (Liu, 2023). Placing AI into the Third Place, this study reinstates the culture and moral intricacy of language learning, wherein technological mediation neutralizes the ideology but instead reallocates it.

Rethinking Intercultural Communicative Competence in AI-Mediated Contexts

Intercultural communicative competence as such is also an issue that the findings provoke a re-examination. Classical ICC models as made by Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006) were created in an environment where intercultural communication was expected to be done between two human interlocutors. The appearance of AI as a communicative interlocutor makes this assumption difficult. This paper claims that AI-mediated interaction requires a broader definition of ICC the definition that encompasses the ability to then engage with algorithmically generated discourse in a critical manner. This interaction includes the acknowledgment of the cultural situatedness of AI products, challenging their representational decisions and bargaining meaning with human and non-human interlocutors. This broadened ICC is dialogic and reflexive in nature as viewed through a Third Place perspective. It is not



that learners internalize any fixed norms of culture but learn to devise adaptive cultural ambiguity strategies. This movement is echoed by the recent research that focuses on the ICC as a process, as opposed to a product (Wang & Devitt, 2022; Karakaş, 2023).

Theoretical Implications for Second Foreign Language Education

The theoretical framework suggested in the given work is especially relevant to the education of the second foreign language which tends to be placed in the background of the institutional programs. Second foreign languages are usually allocated less teaching time than English and are often taught with a very high emphasis on grammatical correctness and simple communicative functions. Putting AI-mediated learning in the context of the Third Place, this paper suggests a qualitative augmentation of the second foreign language learning. Instead of shielding a lack of exposure by performing repetitive exercises, the Third Places produced by AI allows learners to sustain intercultural inquiry. This is consistent with the perception that intercultural learning is dependent not on physical immersion but chances of symbolic interaction of substance (Skidmore, 2023). Besides, the Third Place paradigm recognizes that second language learners of foreign language have multilingual and multicultural repertoires that they contribute to the learning process. Students are not made out to be incompetent speakers who are struggling to imitate native standards but rather as agents of complex linguistic ecologies. This re-conceptualization is an intercession of monolingual ideologies that still dominate the language pedagogy (Kramsch, 2009).

Identity, Agency, and the Intercultural Subject

The other aspect of the discussion that is significant is identity and learner agency. Intercultural competence has also been realized as unavoidable of identity negotiation since the act of using language comes with placing oneself in social and cultural hierarchies (Kramsch, 1997). New possibilities, and challenges, of such negotiation are presented by AI-mediated environments. Hybrid subjectivity The Third Place framework emphasizes the AI-mediated learning as one of the locations of subjectivity, allowing the learners to explore voices, positions, and cultural affiliations. This experimentation is especially good when the second language learners are involved as they tend to be going through several levels of linguistic identity created through their previous foreign language learning experiences. But the increase in identity possibilities also brings up the issue of agency. With a higher influence of AI systems on communicative options, one can risk that the agency of learners might be indirectly limited by algorithmic norms. The discussion thus highlights the significance of pedagogical framing in which the learners are framed as an active contributor of AI-generated discourse, and not as passive consumers.

Ethical Dimensions and Power Relations in AI-Mediated Learning

One of the main issues of this discussion is the ethical implication of AI mediated intercultural learning. Artificial intelligence is conditioned on extensive data volumes that are indicative of the current power dynamics and hegemonic cultural discourses (Liu, 2023; Lee, 2025). Consequently, AI-generated discourse can give preference to some other views at the expense of others. In the eyes of a Third Place, these asymmetries are not accidental but rather are part and parcel of any intercultural communication. The conversation redefines ethical issues as prospects of critical pedagogy, where learners are able to challenge both the erudition and impartiality of AI outputs. This strategy is in line with the critical cultural awareness emphasis of Byram (1997) as an element of ICC. Notably, the discussion warns against simplistic

solutions that would remedy AI bias by using a technical solution, alone. Although it is critical to have algorithmic transparency and fairness, human judgment and moral reflections are eventually mandated in intercultural competence. The Third Place model emphasizes the need to look at an ethical interaction as a product of dialogue, negotiation, and reflexivity instead of technological solutions.

Pedagogical Implications Without Pedagogical Reductionism

Though the presented work is rather theoretical, the implications of the study can be applied to pedagogy. As it is highlighted in the discussion, pedagogical applications must not diminish the Third Place framework to a series of techniques or activities. Rather, it demands a pedagogical shift which favors process in place of product and inquiry as opposed to transmission. Practically, this orientation can be connected with the design of AI-mediated activities, which can prompt the learners to contrast the cultural views, challenge the representations, and reflect on their own placement. Nevertheless, the discussion does not prescriptively cover instructional models but it is understandable given that the implementation of Third Places will differ among the educational settings. Such non-reductive methodology is indicative of a more generalized adherence to pedagogical ethics in terms of the fact that intercultural learning cannot be 100 percent standardized or automated. In this context, AI comes to assist, not to substitute the interpretative task of language education.

Theoretical Limitations and Future Directions

The constraints of the proposed framework have also been noted in the discussion. Being a conceptual framework, it fails to take into consideration, variability of access to technology by learners or institutional variations. Additionally, the framework presupposes the degree of critical interaction that might not appear naturally without pedagogical mediation. In future studies, the implementation of AI-mediated Third Places in particular second foreign language contexts can be empirically studied, or how intercultural trajectories of learners can be changed over time. The framework could be further enhanced through design-based research that will look at the pedagogical viability of the framework. However, the main value of the research is its theoretical shift of the AI-assisted language learning. Using the intercultural competence research in combination with the Third Place theory, the discussion provides a sound conceptual base to be used in the subsequent investigation.

Summary of the Discussion

In summary, the analysis has contextualized the results of the research within the main arguments of AI, intercultural communication, and second foreign language teaching. It has also postulated that AI-sponsored Third Places can provide a strong theoretical perspective to reconsider intercultural communicative competence as a dynamic, ethical, and identity-based process. Such a framework can help to make AI in language education more human-centric by rejecting the technocentric reductionism and foreshadowing symbolic mediation.

CONCLUSION

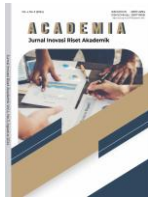
In alignment with the research objectives outlined in the introduction, namely to develop a theoretical framework of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) mediated by artificial intelligence (AI) in second foreign language acquisition based on the Third Place theory, this conclusion underscores the central meaning of the resulting framework. The key significance of the findings lies in a paradigmatic shift. AI is reconceptualised not merely as a

passive technical tool, but as an active agent in intercultural meaning making. By adopting the Third Place perspective, the framework transcends dualistic notions of native versus target cultures and positions learners as active participants engaged in hybridity, negotiation, and critical reflexivity. Thus, the research objective of constructing a contextually dynamic model of ICC within AI mediated learning environments has been achieved at a conceptual level.

The theoretical implication of this study is the filling of a critical gap in the literature by extending classical ICC models to digitally mediated contexts. The practical benefit lies in providing a foundation for educators to integrate AI in a humanistic and culturally reflective manner. As a recommendation, empirical research is urgently needed to examine the implementation of AI mediated Third Spaces across diverse second foreign language learning settings. This includes longitudinal explorations of ethical dimensions and learners' critical consciousness. Ultimately, the pedagogical effectiveness of AI in language education is determined not by technological sophistication, but by the extent to which it is integrated within a theoretically grounded, culturally responsive, and ethically informed framework.

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