

Exploring the Transformation of the Roles of College English Teachers in the AI Era Through A Pedagogical Design of Ba-Shu Culture Integration

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Abstract: With the development of Generative artificial intelligence (AI), the phenomenon of “cultural aphasia” has arisen. College English teaching in China is faced with challenges. From the perspective of human-machine collaboration, this paper proposes that teachers should transform their roles as mediators, coaches, guardians, and facilitators to maintain their irreplaceable position. To illustrate this point, the paper puts forward a pedagogical design integrating Ba-Shu culture. Through a four-stage teaching task, this study attempts to explore how teachers’ roles come into play in cultivating cultural literacy and enhancing intercultural communicative competence. This will reaffirm the teacher’s fundamental mission of value guidance in the intelligent era.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; College English teaching; Teacher role transformation; Human-machine collaboration; Ba-Shu culture

Online publication: May 26, 2026

1. Introduction

In 2022, ChatGPT was released. And then the subsequent bloom of large language models (LLMs) such as ERNIE Bot, Kimi, and Doubao has fundamentally impacted college English teaching, especially the learning behaviors of the students and their responses. Foreign language teachers used to explain vocabulary and correct grammatical errors, and evaluate structural coherence in student writing. If teachers continue to rely on textbook-based vocabulary explanation and isolated sentence analysis, they will find themselves ignored in classrooms. As a consequence, they not only fail to stimulate students but also precipitate a severe crisis of professional identity and pedagogical value.

Today, generative AI can help students fulfill core linguistic tasks like producing perfect drafts, delivering context-sensitive translations and facilitating spontaneous, interactive dialogues. Compared to knowledge retrieval speed and data storage capacity, human educators inevitably fall behind cloud-

based large language models. There is no denying that AI technology has brought immense convenience to language acquisition; however, it has also propelled foreign language teachers to a critical crossroads of professional transformation ^[1].

If language teaching is merely about grammar and vocabulary, AI can undoubtedly automate the majority of foundational linguistic tasks. However, the essence of education, especially college education, is more than skill acquisition. Teachers must evolve from being mere “trainers” of linguistic skills into “guides” who efficiently collaborate with intelligent machines. Besides, teachers must uphold their original mission of moral and cultural cultivation. Since machines inherently lack emotional experience, ethical judgment, and culturally bound nature, language teachers are required to comprehend the profound philosophical and historical implications embedded within a language. Therefore, AI does not eliminate the need for foreign language teachers. Instead, it urgently needs a profound role transformation. To explore this transformation in specific cultural contexts, this study applies Ba-Shu culture in the teaching design. As a local culture in Sichuan, it is a distinctive regional cultural system originating from ancient Ba and Shu states, now encompassing the Sichuan and Chongqing regions of China. Ba-Shu culture is known for its unique culinary traditions, folk arts, and social philosophy.

2. Literature review

Since the appearance of AI, its integration into foreign language education has drawn the interest of scholars worldwide in recent years. The use of AI tools in facilitating language acquisition, particularly in providing instantaneous, personalized feedback on pronunciation, syntax, and lexical choices, has been widely studied.

2.1. AI and the evolution of foreign language teaching

Scholars advocate for a human-machine collaborative (HMC) framework in foreign language teaching. Chen and Gu (2008) laid early theoretical foundations for computer-assisted language learning, emphasizing the interaction between human cognition and digital environments ^[2]. Recent studies highlight that the integration of Large Language Models disrupts the traditional cognitive division of labor in the classroom. Wang (2023) notes that AI’s capacity to generate high-quality texts forces a re-evaluation of what constitutes valuable learning in college English. When the mechanical aspects of language production are outsourced to machines, the cognitive focus of learning must ascend to higher-level thinking skills, such as rhetorical evaluation, creative expression, and critical analysis.

2.2. Cultural aphasia and the necessity of value education

As AI corpora are predominantly derived from Western internet sources, this poses a subtle yet profound risk. When AI processes Chinese cultural concepts, it frequently applies Western logical frameworks, resulting in literal translations, cultural misinterpretations, or even implicit cultural derogation. A critical concern within the Chinese educational context is the phenomenon of “cultural aphasia”. It refers to the phenomenon that foreign language learners cannot accurately express local culture in a foreign language in the process of cross-cultural communication. If students habitually rely on direct AI translation, they risk losing their sensitivity to native culture. Take college English teaching in China as an example; the main reasons for this phenomenon are the lack of accumulation of Chinese culture among learners and the neglect

of Chinese culture by foreign language educators. The Ministry of Education (2020) explicitly mandates the integration of value education into all curriculum design, emphasizing the need to cultivate students' cultural confidence and their ability to "tell China's story well." This calls for the teacher's guidance. By embedding local cultural resources in the curriculum, teachers would guide students to maintain a critical stance when interacting with AI outputs. This requires an explicit adherence to the native cultural stance ^[3].

2.3. Human-machine collaboration and teacher agency

Building upon this, contemporary scholars argue that in an AI-driven ecology, teacher agency must be reasserted through cognitive management, guiding students' thinking, and offering necessary learning structures. Hu (2023) emphasizes that teachers' professional development must steer towards digital literacy, pedagogical innovation, and ethical oversight^[4]. Furthermore, Wen (2023) suggests that teachers should reconstruct their competence from being knowledge providers to learning environment architects^[5]. Chen (2025) advocates that the construction of the digital teaching application competence for teachers is a response to the new demands. These demands are placed on teacher roles by the digital teaching paradigm. Based on these theoretical and conceptual insights, this paper figures that the core of college English teachers' role lies in cultural guardianship and value guidance^[6].

3. Teaching dilemmas under technological impact

Nowadays, classroom educators are confronting challenges primarily in three dimensions: The diminishing relevance of conventional pedagogy, the gradual undermining of instructional authority, and the subtle yet profound crisis of sociocultural values.

For decades, college English teaching in China has heavily invested in mechanical training, such as vocabulary dictation, grammar drills, and formulaic translation. However, the use of AI has weakened these language techniques. Modern translation software provides richer contextual examples than dictionaries, and AI writing assistants generate structurally complete essays within seconds. So students perceive that AI can fulfill these basic requirements more efficiently, and they do not engage in class activities. This pervasive "de-skilling" trend suggests that if educators persist in traditional mechanical training, their pedagogical value will diminish significantly. Furthermore, in the traditional classroom pattern, where the teacher served as the primary authoritative source of knowledge, the teacher's authority is being disrupted by easy access to information online. When students encounter complex syntax or grammar, they would turn to an AI device for more comprehensive and structured explanations instead of asking teachers. Therefore, students recognize that AI devices can surpass human educators in knowledge and response speed, and they choose to be quiet and seldom ask questions. Consequently, teacher-centered lecturing is no longer effective, so in the AI era, the teaching model must shift toward collaborative exploration.

4. Teacher role reshaping through a design for Ba-Shu culture integration

To address these dilemmas, this paper proposes that a transformation of the roles of language teachers is necessary. By implementing Human-Machine Collaboration in teaching activities, this section outlines four critical roles of teachers as mediator, coach, guardian, and facilitator. Then, an exploratory design for Ba-Shu culture is proposed to demonstrate how these roles are displayed in teaching practice.

4.1. Roles of foreign language teachers in the AI era

To enact the HMC theoretical framework, teachers must abandon the outdated “pedant” image and embrace a more flexible and diverse professional identity. There are four dimensions in the teachers’ role transformation.

4.1.1. Mediator of learning resources and cognitive scaffolding

It is generally agreed that generative AI can produce infinite textual data. When students access information from it, they tend to lack the critical ability to distinguish quality, relevance, and accuracy. So the teacher should act as a “mediator,” utilizing professional judgment to help students filter and access high-quality linguistic corpora, and selecting appropriate AI tools for specific learning objectives. More importantly, the teacher must design higher-order learning tasks of “human-machine” collaboration. For example, the teacher might instruct the AI to generate a preliminary draft or gather background information, while he also gives tasks like critical evaluation, rhetorical restructuring, and the injection of cultural nuance. This deliberate division of labor optimizes the human-machine collaboration, ensuring that technology amplifies rather than replaces human intellect.

4.1.2. Coach of critical thinking

As AI can effectively resolve issues of linguistic formal accuracy, the focus of classroom instruction must shift from “how to express correctly” to “how to think deeply”. Teachers should adopt a critical mindset toward technology. They should teach the students to interrogate AI outputs and actively hunt for AI-induced biases, logical fallacies, and cultural distortions. Teachers and students can collaboratively deconstruct and evaluate AI-generated content. In this process, teachers can help students develop the critical thinking skills essential for navigating complex information.

4.1.3. Guardian of cultural confidence

This role is the keystone of the foreign language teacher’s value in the intelligent era. Even though AI possesses awesome syntactic processing power, it remains culturally insensitive. It cannot perceive the intricate web of social relations implied by the Chinese concept, nor can it grasp the historical meaning embedded in traditional arts like “Bian Lian” (Face-changing in Sichuan Opera). The teacher must serve as the ultimate guardian of cross-cultural translation. When students encounter AI-generated translations that distort or misinterpret local culture, the teacher must intervene promptly. They guide students to interpret human cultural intuition and emotional resonance effectively.

4.1.4. Facilitator of emotional interaction and learning motivation

Language acquisition is not a sterile cognitive process; it is deeply intertwined with affect and emotion^[7]. It is a deeply social, affective, and contextualized human experience. Although AI can provide instantaneous grammatical feedback, it is fundamentally incapable of offering genuine empathy, encouragement, or spiritual support. Teachers can. They will closely monitor students’ psychological states and mitigate the alienation and anxiety from over-reliance or frustration with technology. Through authentic interpersonal interaction, teachers construct a learning community where students can interact with humanistic warmth. And the genuine desire to stick with language learning is inspired over time.

4.2. A pedagogical design to explore Ba-Shu cultural integration

Ba-Shu culture is characterized by its distinct regional philosophy, culinary traditions, and social dynamics, with a significant blind spot in current AI corpora. This makes it an entry point for exposing AI bias and exploring value guidance in college English teaching.

4.2.1. Proposed context and objectives

The author takes the course at her school as an example. As additional material for college teaching, topics such as Sichuan's history, tea culture, the splendid landscapes of Ba-Shu, and Ba-Shu cuisine are selected for the course. For example, culturally specific terms such as “Bai Longmen Zhen,” “Jianghu Qi,” and “Bashi” (teahouse) are selected as core linguistic and cultural materials. English input and output activities centered on these are conducted, aiming to foster students' capacity to narrate Chinese culture in English. In this paper, the design takes the first-year college English course for non-English majors as an illustrative example. The primary objectives are envisioned as follows: (1) to guide students in identifying the “cultural blind spots” and Western biases presented in AI translations; (2) to develop students' prompt crafting skills to contextualize AI outputs better; (3) to spark a sense of responsibility to correct machine translations and outputs, to foster students' cultural confidence.

4.2.2. Human-machine collaborative process

To explore how the newly defined teacher roles function in the teaching process, a four-week instructional module titled “The Bilingual Promotion of Sichuan Ba-Shu Culture” is proposed here, in order to illustrate how teachers could organically integrate local culture with human-machine collaboration.

(1) Phase 1: Creating Cognitive Conflict and Exposing AI Bias (Week 1)

First, teachers design a task for students to use popular AI translation tools (e.g., ChatGPT or DeepL) to translate the phrase “成都茶馆里的江湖气”. Unsurprisingly, the translations given by students are typically generated as literal, often negatively twisted translations such as “gangster atmosphere” or “underworld vibe,” Because they trust AI and use it to do this task directly. At this stage, the teacher acts as a mediator, deliberately holding back the urge to correct. Instead, the teacher would ask, “Does ‘gangster atmosphere’ accurately reflect the cultural and social reality of a Chengdu teahouse? What does ‘Jianghu Qi’ actually mean to the local people?” Obviously, the answer is “No.” Then the teacher students would instruct the students to figure out the difference between the AI's culturally impoverished translation and the proper translation with the students' lived cultural experience. The shocking contrast would create a cognitive conflict, vividly exposing the biased perspectives presented in AI translations.

(2) Phase 2: Practicing Prompt Crafting and Manual Correction (week 2)

Having identified the limitations of unmediated AI, the teacher would guide students to optimize their interaction with the tool. Here, the teacher assumes the role of a coach. He introduces the concept of “prompt crafting” and emphasizes that simple translation commands are inadequate for transmitting complex cultural nuances. Students would need to supply the AI with rich contextual guidance. For instance, the teacher might guide students to construct a detailed prompt: “In the context of Chengdu teahouses, ‘Jianghu Qi’ refers to an equal, open, and thriving grassroots social climate, stripped of gangster implications. Please provide a free translation that resonates with native English speakers while preserving this specific Chinese cultural implication.” Through repeated rounds of prompt refinement and comparative analysis of the AI's evolving outputs, students would begin to grasp the subtleties of cross-cultural translation. They would learn that AI

can not fulfill the task without the human mind.

(3) Phase 3: Conducting Peer Review (Week 3)

In this phase, the teacher divides the students into small groups to work on translating a short promotional text about a specific Sichuan dish (e.g., “夫妻肺片” Fuqi Feipian or “担担面” Dan Dan Noodles). Each group would generate an AI draft, and then the texts would be subjected to rigorous peer review. Students are required to evaluate the drafts using assessment criteria focused not merely on grammatical correctness, but on “cultural fidelity” and “target audience appeal.” In this phase, the teacher, as a guardian, challenges students to find more evocative adjectives or better metaphors that capture the culinary and cultural essence of the dish, safeguarding the cultural integrity of the text.

(4) Phase 4: Presenting and Reflecting on the Final Work (Week 4)

In the final phase, students from different groups are required to present their finalized bilingual promotional texts to the class and share the specific challenges they encountered. For instance, some students complain about the AI’s initial failures and demonstrate how they direct and adjust the prompt to correct them. Then, the teacher, as a facilitator, gives some positive comments and instructions to secure the students as dynamic cultural promoters rather than passive users of AI outputs.

4.2.3. Proposed evaluation and assessment

In this design, assessment would focus on a process-oriented evaluation instead of the final translation product. After the four stages, students are required to submit an “AI-Assisted Learning” log as a basis for assessment. This comprehensive assessment would contain four aspects: (1) the initial input prompts; (2) the feedback generated from AI; (3) the students’ critical reflections on the AI’s defects; and (4) the specific revision strategies that can be used. These assessment criteria serve dual purposes. On the one hand, it works as a barrier against over-reliance on unedited AI text. On the other hand, it would provide the teacher with transparent data and evidence to evaluate the student’s demonstration of critical thinking, cultural awareness, and collaborative efficacy. In brief, the assessment would improve the student’s ability to identify cultural biases and cultivate the creativity and critical thinking of students.

5. Conclusion and implications

With the advancement of artificial intelligence, the corresponding transformation of teachers’ roles in foreign language education is unavoidable. Teachers should not regard it as a threat, but embrace it as an assistant to promote education to return to its humanistic roots.

AI can never replace College English teachers as mediators, coaches, guardians, and facilitators. In the realm of cultural values education, these human roles hold an irreplaceable significance, because it depends on them to ensure that cultural heritage is genuinely transmitted and internalized. In future teaching practice, teachers should firmly protect cultural values in human-machine collaboration, and employ AI as a tool for human growth. The pedagogical design proposed in this study, though preliminary in nature, is intended to offer new perspectives for future foreign language teaching in the AI era. Future research should prioritize empirical, longitudinal studies across diverse cultural contexts to ensure its broader applicability and profound significance in developing students’ intercultural competence.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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