IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)
Volume 31, Issue 11, Series 3 (November, 2026) 64-67
e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845.
www.iosrjournals.org

From "Aphasia" To "Articulacy": College Students' Intercultural English Expression Ability Under the Genai Pathway and Teaching Strategies

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Abstract
College students' ability to express Chinese culture in English has long been troubled by "Chinese cultural aphasia". Its crux does not lie in insufficient language proficiency, but in a structural misalignment among cultural interpretation resources, training opportunities, and assessment orientations. Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) provides new technological conditions for this predicament and can play a role in language correction, cognitive scaffolding, and immediate feedback, while at the same time carrying the risk of compressing cultural meanings into algorithm-preferred templates. Based on existing research findings, this paper outlines the manifestations and roots of the aphasia phenomenon, analyzes the operable pathways and inherent tensions of GenAI in intercultural English expression, and then proposes a strategic framework of "cultural corpus calibration, embedding critical AI literacy, and reconstructing curriculum assessment". This paper argues that the teaching value of GenAI lies in liberating students from lower-order language barriers so that they can direct cognitive resources toward cultural judgment and meaning negotiation.

Keywords: *Intercultural English expression; Chinese cultural aphasia; Generative artificial intelligence; Critical AI literacy; College English*

Date of Submission: 09-11-2026 Date of Acceptance: 21-11-2026

I. INTRODUCTION

"Telling China's stories well in English" has become a rigid goal and a mission of the times for college English teaching[1]. However, the establishment of a goal does not automatically produce the ability. Yan Ming and Yu Liming, in their 2025 discussion in Contemporary Foreign Language Studies, explicitly pointed out that the "Chinese cultural aphasia" problem "remains prominent" even as national discourse awareness increasingly receives attention[2]. It is no longer merely a chronic teaching problem, but a key issue concerning the strategic implications of intercultural education from the perspective of English as an international language (EIL).

The rapid penetration of generative artificial intelligence is changing the technological conditions of this predicament. GenAI can generate explanatory paragraphs around specific concepts, adjust register, and provide intercultural comparison frameworks, offering unprecedented immediate language scaffolding for foreign language teaching. Kong Lei and Yang Xinrui systematically analyzed the pathways by which artificial intelligence empowers the integration of Chinese culture into foreign language teaching from the two levels of "cultural understanding" and "cultural narration", noting that large language models can support cultural theme analysis at the level of cultural understanding and assist in optimizing expression at the level of cultural narration[3]. But technology is never a neutral panacea. For instance, Zheng Yongyan analyzed the application of GenAI in foreign language education and systematically reviewed its key controversies, reminding the academic community that while embracing technology and it is necessary to examine the potential usurpation of the value rationality of language education by instrumental rationality[4]. If teaching introduces GenAI into intercultural expression uncritically, students may very likely acquire a kind of "fluent but flat" ability, that is, the sentences become smoother, but cultural meanings are diluted by algorithm-preferred templates, and students' judgment rights as subjects of cultural interpretation may even be quietly ceded.

Based on relevant research from the past five years, this paper analyzes the operable links and boundaries of GenAI intervention, and proposes a strategic framework that balances technological empowerment and cultural subjectivity.

1. MANIFESTATIONS AND STRUCTURAL ROOTS OF APHASIA

"Chinese cultural aphasia" is not a vague judgment of "poor English", but presents an identifiable layered structure in the process of expression.

The first layer is the gap at the level of cultural vocabulary and imagery. What students master are often dictionary-style equivalent words rather than culturally loaded expression resources. For example, they know that "dragon" corresponds to "Loong", but they do not clearly understand how the authority and auspicious connotations of "Loong" in the Chinese context are conveyed through the choice of modifiers. Similarly, they know "Mid-Autumn Festival", but find it difficult to explain how "tuanyuan" as a social ethic is reproduced in festival practices. Kong Lei and Yang Xinrui pointed out that the level of cultural understanding involves a deep grasp of the connotations of cultural imagery, while the level of cultural narration requires transforming such understanding into appropriate L2 expression[3]. Beneath the vocabulary gap is the failure of cultural cognition to be effectively transformed into retrievable L2 expression schemas.

The second layer is the rupture in discourse organization and argumentative logic. Even if students have mastered several cultural terms, organizing these terms into coherent and persuasive English interpretations remains extremely difficult. Xu Fang[5], in a 2025 action research study in Foreign Language World, constructed an operational definition of "depth of thought" from three dimensions: authenticity of thought and emotion, critical creativity of thinking, and appropriateness of language expression. Through a combination of AI interaction strategy guidance and multi-genre writing tasks, the study helped students gradually form a personal voice in intertextual negotiation with AI. This research precisely provides counter-evidence for the prevalence of "superficiality of thought" in traditional writing teaching: if students are not guided, their cultural interpretations can easily degenerate into "lists of facts" lacking logical links rather than narratives with internal connections.

The third layer is the absence of intercultural meta-awareness. Many students assume by default that "translating Chinese culture into English" is a one-way code conversion process, lacking conscious judgment about "who the readers are" and "which cultural presuppositions need to be made explicit". Although Kong Lei and Yang Xinrui's framework of "cultural understanding and cultural narration" describes two levels at which AI can intervene, the framework also implies a premise, that is, the subject of understanding and narration is always the student, and the role of AI is "assistance" rather than "replacement"[3]. If students lack awareness of "why it should be narrated in this way", any language tool intervention will be difficult to reach the deeper pathology of aphasia.

2. EMPOWERMENT PATHWAYS OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

1. Release of Cognitive Resources and Provision of Language Scaffolding

Xu Fang's action research shows that, through AI interaction strategy guidance, students can gradually form a personal voice in intertextual negotiation with AI, enhance critical thinking and socio-cognitive complexity, and improve language expression ability adapted to context[5]. The core significance of this finding is not that "AI revises better than students" but rather the redistribution of cognitive resources. When students no longer expend a large amount of working memory on surface issues such as tense consistency and preposition collocations, they can turn their attention to whether cultural judgments are clear and whether expressions will produce unexpected associations for target readers.

2. Promotion of Depth of Critical Expression Through Human-Machine Collaboration, and The Irreplaceability of Teacher Mediation

Relying on the "Understanding Contemporary China" college English course, Hu Jiehui and Chen Xuemei compared the effects of "GenAI and teacher collaborative intervention" and "GenAI-only intervention" through a quasi-experimental design[6]. The results show that human-machine dyadic interaction can improve writing critical thinking ability, but the "teacher-student-machine" triadic interaction model is more effective. At the micro level, language expression is more rigorous and propositional relations are clearer, while at the meso level, the precision, relevance, and logic of argumentative analysis, inference, and evaluation are significantly improved. This finding rejects the two extreme positions of "AI omnipotence" and "AI uselessness". GenAI provides immediate scaffolding that is difficult to achieve at scale in traditional classrooms, but teacher intervention remains the key mediation for transforming scaffolding into deep learning.

3. Nonlinear Effects on Writing Development from The Perspective of Dynamic Systems

Dong Jihua and Wang Hao used complex dynamic systems theory as a framework and compared 217 argumentative essays from a GenAI-assisted class and a traditional teaching class, systematically examining the effects of GenAI on the development of L2 writing syntactic complexity and its complex network features[7]. The value of this research lies in reminding language learners that the impact of GenAI on writing development is not simple linear causality, but is embedded in a complex dynamic system. This means that when introducing GenAI into intercultural expression teaching, one cannot expect that "it will be effective once used"; rather, attention

must be paid to the teaching conditions under which and the ways in which it participates in students' expression processes.

4. Empowerment and Risk Coexist

Zheng Yongyan, in analyzing the key controversies of generative artificial intelligence in foreign language education, pointed out that technological application is accompanied by theoretical issues and potential risks that require careful treatment[4]. A more specific warning comes from Darvin[8] that the use of GenAI in L2 writing must involve critical digital literacy; access at the tool level alone is insufficient to guarantee learning quality. He proposed materiality, indexicality, and ideology as key analytical constructs to help students understand how GenAI platforms "privileging certain ways of thinking and writing". Sun[9], based on a qualitative analysis of Chinese EAL students' negotiations with GenAI, further conceptualized critical AI literacy as an examination of power relations in writing education. Students not only need to judge whether AI output is "right or wrong", but also need to ask "whose knowledge is presented as standard" and "whose voice is marginalized". Sun and Lan's 2025 study likewise shows that enhancing critical language awareness in EAL writing requires placing "language choices" and "power examination" within the same task framework[10]. Ahmed et al.'s cross-cultural comparative study, taking EFL/ESL students in China, the UAE, and the United States as subjects, found that students with the support of structured reflection protocols could identify "Western-centric and globalization frameworks" in AI-generated content, but the degree of explicit naming of bias varied by educational level, disciplinary background, and cultural context[11]. A 2026 scoping review[12], after reviewing 26 empirical studies, pointed out that most studies did not directly examine learners' critical AI literacy in evaluating or revising GenAI-generated content. Hwang, Chang, and Sun[13] further asked: GenAI is certainly useful for L2 writing, but "when, why, and for how long learners use it" are the key questions determining its effects. This means that if GenAI is introduced into intercultural expression teaching without criticality, what students acquire may be an expression ability that "looks professional" but is "culturally hollow".

3. TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR GENAI-EMPOWERED COLLEGE STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL ENGLISH EXPRESSION ABILITY

Effective teaching strategies should not revolve around "whether AI is allowed", but around "at which cognitive stages AI is needed and at which stages it must be transcended".

1. Starting With Cultural Corpus Calibration to Rebuild The Content Foundation of Expression

One root of aphasia is the scarcity of English expression resources for cultural knowledge. GenAI's generative capacity can serve as a starting point for corpus production and comparison, but it must be checked and balanced by authoritative cultural knowledge. Kong Lei and Yang Xinrui[3] divided AI's functions in cultural teaching into two levels, including "cultural understanding" and "cultural narration". At the understanding level, large language models can support cultural theme analysis; at the narration level, they can assist in optimizing expression, but they must never replace students' judgment of the cultural core. Teachers can focus on propositions such as "harmony without uniformity" and "family-state isomorphism", requiring students first to use GenAI to generate multiple English interpretation versions, then compare them with authoritative literature, and identify one by one which expressions accurately convey cultural logic and which fall into simplification or misreading. This trains both the "ability to use" and the "ability to scrutinize".

2. Embedding Critical AI Literacy into Every Expression Task Rather Than As An Add-on Module

If critical thinking training is arranged as a separate stage of "learn expression first, then discuss criticality", it is almost destined to be regarded by students as an extra burden. An effective approach is to weave critical questioning directly into GenAI-assisted expression tasks. The three constructs of materiality, indexicality, and ideology proposed by Darvin[6] provide operable handles for such embedding: after asking GenAI to generate an English introduction to "Spring Festival", teachers can guide students to ask which elements this text highlights, and which elements it omits, what kind of family imagination its use of "family reunion" points to, and whether it's sufficient to carry the ethical weight of "tuanyuan" in Chinese society? If the target readers are North American college students, which background presuppositions need to be made explicit, and which expressions might be read as "exotic"? Sun and Lan's research showed that this kind of training, which juxtaposes language choices with power examination, is precisely the core mechanism for developing critical language awareness[10]. Similarly, Hu Jiehui and Chen Xuemei's research provided direct evidence for the necessity of teacher mediation: students' improvement in "argumentative analysis, inference, and evaluation" under the triadic model does not come from AI itself, but from the mediation work teachers undertake between humans and AI[6]. The essence of critical AI literacy is to enable students, in the process of scrutinizing AI, to become more clearly aware of their own cultural stance and expression choices.

3. Reconstructing Curriculum Assessment: Making Cultural Expression An "Assessed Ability"

The sustainability of any teaching strategy ultimately depends on whether the assessment system leaves institutional space for it. In many college English courses at present, cultural expression exists at most in the form of "classroom presentations" or "bonus items", lacking task status equal to argumentative writing. A reasonable direction for reform is to set "explaining a Chinese cultural concept in English" as one of the core task types and to establish matching assessment dimensions: accuracy of cultural information, depth and coherence of interpretation, sensitivity to target-reader presuppositions, and rationality of revision decisions in human-machine collaboration. The "micro, meso, macro" hierarchical critical thinking assessment framework constructed by Hu Jiehui and Chen Xuemei[6] provides an operable path for reference: the micro level examines language expression and propositional relations; the meso level examines the analytical quality and logic of argumentation; and the macro level examines the diversity and effectiveness of writing strategies. At the teacher level, there is a need to shift from "language error corrector" to "collaborator in cultural judgment". As Wang, Tian, and Christiansen called for, in the GenAI era, L2 writing teaching must move toward a design principle of "juxtaposing criticality and humanistic concerns[14]. GenAI offers the scalable possibility of immediate feedback, but the guidance work of transforming feedback into deep cultural learning must still be completed by humans.

IV. CONCLUSION

The weakness of college students' intercultural English expression ability is not a skill gap that can be "fixed" by a single technological solution, but a systemic problem shaped jointly by curriculum structure, assessment orientation, and cultural teaching concepts. GenAI deserves serious attention not because it can write more idiomatic English for students, but because for the first time it makes it possible for "immediate, interactive cognitive scaffolding" to enter classrooms at scale. However, the realization of this possibility depends on whether teachers are willing to position AI as a "collaborator that needs to be scrutinized" rather than a "tool to be obeyed"; on whether the assessment system is willing to place the depth of cultural interpretation on the same level as language accuracy; and on whether students are guided to ask: when the algorithm chooses a way of expressing Chinese culture for you, what have you lost, and what right of judgment have you retained? The transformation from "aphasia" to "articulacy" is ultimately not a technical issue of human-machine relations, but an educational issue concerning cultural subjectivity.

FUNDING

This research was funded by the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program of Panzhihua University (Grant No. S202411360076) and International Communication Research Center of Panxi Culture (Grant No. 25PXWHZD04).

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