

# *The Influence of Individual Differences of Italian Learners on Oral Expression Ability under LS Framework—A Case Study of Italian Majors in Jilin International Studies University*

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of "mute foreign language" is becoming more and more common, and how to effectively improve foreign language learners' oral expression ability has become the focus of attention of more and more teachers and students of foreign language majors. However, due to the existence of individual differences, foreign language learners in the framework of LS may face various challenges in improving their oral expression ability. The author's major is Italian, and this paper will study the relationship and influence of individual differences on Italian learners' oral expression ability under the LS framework from the perspective of individual differences, and provide references and suggestions for Italian learners' personalised learning of oral language and Italian teaching by distributing questionnaires to the students majoring in Italian at Jilin International Studies University.

## **1. Introduction**

In Italian, LS refers to *LinguaStraniera*, meaning foreign language, a term commonly used to denote the learning and use of a non-native language, especially in education and language learning. With the deepening of diversified and multi-faceted research on speaking teaching, the concept of individual differences has slowly attracted extensive attention from researchers, which may include differences in learners' learning strategies, personality traits and so on<sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary, both for teachers and learners of Italian, to fully understand the impact of these individual differences on the oral expression of Italian learners in the LS framework.

Domestic research on individual differences of foreign language learners has been on the rise only after entering the 21st century, and there is still a lot of room for exploring the research on the relationship between individual differences and foreign language oral expression, and the research theme shows the phenomenon of "imbalance".

In more than a century, foreign research on foreign language teaching and learning has evolved from the initial translation method and direct method to the later listening method and cognitive method, and to the present communicative method. Individual differences in learners are one of the

five main areas of foreign research on foreign language teaching and oral expression (research on phonemic development of spoken language; speech discrimination, oral expression and their interrelationships among oral learners; factors affecting oral learners' attitudes and motivation in oral learning; mother-tongue transfer from the perspective of language change, linguistic typology, and marking; and research on oral language teaching).

## **2. Concept and classification of individual differences**

Individual differences refer to the different stability characteristics of foreign language learners, including language proficiency, learning methods, learning styles, personalities, etc. Since 1970 (e.g., Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978), the study of learners' individual differences has attracted widespread attention and gradually developed into an important topic in foreign language research and foreign language learning. At present, more and more studies divide individual differences into two categories: psychological and physiological<sup>[1]</sup>. For the purposes of the psychological categorisation involved in this research, this refers to differences in cognitive styles, interests, emotions and willpower.

## **3. Characteristics of the Italian language and its spoken expressions**

**Gesture richness:** Italians tend to use a lot of gestures to support their expressions, which can help Italians to enhance the richness and vividness of their language.

**Pitch changes:** Italian is a tonal language, and changes in pitch can sometimes change the meaning of words. Therefore, Italians usually focus on the use of intonation in their spoken communication to emphasise or differentiate the meaning of different words.

**Fast and Fluent:** Italians usually speak at a fast and fluid pace, with few pauses or breaks in their sentences.

**Direct and emotional:** Italians tend to express their thoughts and emotions directly, a style of language that can make conversations more passionate and interesting.

## **4. Research methodology**

**Research tools and research questions:** mainly carried out by means of literature analysis method and questionnaires, aiming at investigating and studying the specific effects of individual differences on learners' ability to express themselves orally in Italian. The questionnaire was set up to focus on three areas: (1) learners' attitudes towards learning; (2) learners' personalities; (3) learners' psycho-emotional factors (self-confidence, anxiety, self-esteem) when engaging in oral expression

**Subjects:** this study was conducted with some undergraduate students majoring in Italian at Jilin International Studies University, where the author is studying.

**Data collection and collation:** this questionnaire survey issued questionnaires of three types, each type of questionnaire returned 20 valid questionnaires, the total number of copies of 60, each type of questionnaire involves a minimum of 10 topics, a maximum of 17, the topic of the option of 2-4 ranging from the questionnaire options are single-choice, each option according to the content and the order of the different are set to a certain point value.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Learning attitudes

Attitude towards learning refers to learners' behavioural tendencies and their willingness to affirm or negate intrinsic responses to learning in a more sustained manner. Learning attitudes can be classified as conscious, interested and forced according to learning performance<sup>[1]</sup>.

A total of 20 questionnaires were distributed in this survey, 20 valid copies were recovered, and there were 11 questions in the questionnaire. Self-conscious learning attitude is distributed in the questionnaire questions 1-6, the part of the full score of 19 points; interest-based learning attitude is distributed in the questionnaire question 7, full score of 3 points; forced learning attitude is distributed in the questionnaire questions 8-10, full score of 9 points. The closer the sum of the option scores is to the full score, the higher the degree of this type of attitude of the learner.

According to the statistics of the survey results (Figure 1), among the three different types of learning attitudes, the self-conscious learning attitude has the strongest relationship with oral expression ability, and its effect on prompting learners to improve their oral expression ability is also the most significant. The higher the degree of self-awareness of learners, the better the oral expression ability. The second is the interest-based learning attitude, while the forced learning attitude has a negative impact on learners and hinders their oral expression in Italian.

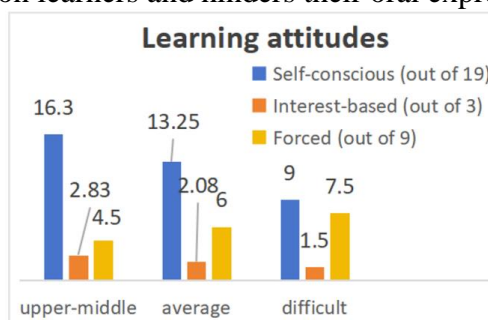


Figure 1: Learning attitudes

### 5.2 Learner personality

Personality is expressed as a person's stable attitude towards reality and the habitual way of behaviour that corresponds to this attitude. The questionnaire was based on the classification of introverted and extroverted personalities proposed by the psychologist Jung and the classification of intermediate personalities (which, as the name suggests, contains both introverted and extroverted traits, but neither of them is predominant) proposed by other specialists, in order to study the relationship between learners' personalities and their ability to express themselves orally in Italian.

According to the statistics of the survey results, among the learners with extroverted personality, 50 per cent of the students' self-assessed speaking level is at the upper-middle level, 37.5 per cent of them have an average level of oral expression, and 12.5 per cent have difficulty in oral expression; among the learners with intermediate personality, 37.5 per cent of the learners' self-assessed speaking level is at the upper-middle level, and 62.5 per cent of the learners have an average level of self-evaluation of their oral expression. Among the introverted learners, 75% of them had average self-rated oral expression and 25% had difficulty in oral expression. The average scores of the three personality learners in the oral classes expression situation are shown in Figure 2. From the above data, we can see that there is an effect of learners' personality on oral expression ability, and that extroverted learners are more prominent in oral expression ability than intermediate and introverted learners. It can be seen that extroverted personality is more conducive to promoting the

learning and expression of oral language.

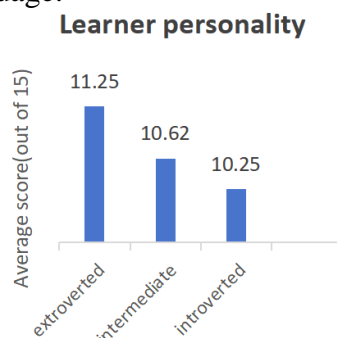


Figure 2: Learner personality

### 5.3 Learner psychological factors

There are three psychological factors involved in this questionnaire, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-esteem. There were 20 questionnaires distributed in this survey, with 20 valid copies. There are 17 questions in the questionnaire, anxiety related questions are distributed in questionnaire 1-4, self-esteem related questions are distributed in questionnaire 5-10, and self-confidence related questions are distributed in questionnaire 12-17.

#### 5.3.1 Anxiety

Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling that accompanies the premonition that some unknown event is about to happen. Excessive anxiety can make it difficult for learners to concentrate and interfere with memory processes, which can affect learners' productivity and physical and mental health. The questions in the questionnaire involving anxiety scored a total of 14. From the graphical data (Figure 3), it can be analysed that there is some influence of anxiety factor on the learners' oral expression ability, but the degree of influence is not significant for the learners who have medium or upper-middle level of oral expression ability.

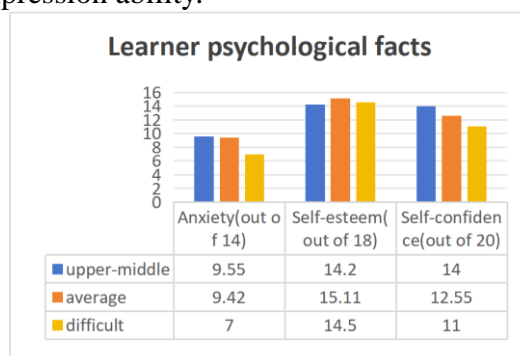


Figure 3: Learner psychological facts

#### 5.3.2 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is an individual's evaluation and perception of his or her own worth, competence and self-confidence. It is a person's feelings and attitudes about his or her self-identity and self-worth. Too much self-esteem can easily lead to vanity; too little self-esteem can lead to inferiority complex.

The questions in this section of the questionnaire were scored out of a total of 18. The closer the score is to 18, the lower the learner's self-esteem is. The data in Figure 3 shows that it is not true

that the stronger the self-esteem of the learner, the stronger the oral expression. Strong and weak are relative concepts, and too much or too little self-esteem can have a detrimental effect on learning.

### 5.3.3 Self-confidence

Self-confidence is a conscious trait, a psychological state that positively and effectively expresses self-esteem, self-respect and self-knowledge. The degree of self-confidence affects people's psychology and behavior in many areas, such as learning and social interaction.

The questionnaire involves this part of the questions full score of 20. From the data in Figure 3, we can see that there is a correlation between self-confidence and learners' oral expression ability; learners with stronger self-confidence are more courageous to open their mouths to express themselves, and usually behave positively in oral classes, which improves their oral expression ability; those with weaker self-confidence lack the courage to show their courage in oral classes, answer the questions with smaller voices, and often behave hesitantly, and make mistakes in their oral exchanges more frequently<sup>[1]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Individual difference factors affecting Italian learners' oral expression ability in the LS framework also include the influence of Italian language foundation, learning method, own willpower, and social environment such as family and school on learners' own oral expression ability. Now we propose relevant countermeasures and pedagogical hints based on the above three individual difference factors.

### 6.1 Correct attitude towards learning

It is often said that "attitude determines everything", therefore, in the process of oral learning or daily oral expression, learners should have a correct and good learning attitude, and take the initiative to understand the importance of learning attitude to improve the ability to express themselves in Italian, especially to understand the obstacle and influence of inappropriate learning attitude to improve the ability to express themselves in Italian.

Teachers should pay more attention to and understand students' attitudes towards learning Italian, stimulate students' interest in learning Italian, and create a relaxing and pleasant learning atmosphere for students<sup>[2]</sup>. If most of the students have a compulsive learning attitude, they should communicate with the students to understand the root causes of their compulsive learning, and help them solve the difficulties in the process of oral expression in a timely manner, so as to improve the autonomy of students' oral expression.

### 6.2 Finding the right way to learn to speak

Many studies have shown that in listening and speaking, most people believe that extroversion is favourable to language learning, because extroverted learners tend to actively participate in language learning activities and look for more opportunities to communicate in order to improve their oral expression compared to introverted or intermediate learners. Therefore, it is important for learners to have a clear understanding of their own personality, to find the most suitable learning methods and learning styles for themselves, and to take the initiative to overcome the negative factors that may hinder the improvement of their oral expression skills due to their own personality. In the teaching of oral expression, it is sometimes difficult to achieve the desired effect only by a single teaching method. Teachers can, on the basis of understanding and grasping the students' personality characteristics, tailor the teaching to the students' needs, and issue learning tasks for

students with different personalities that can give full play to their strengths.

### 6.3 Cultivate a healthy and positive psychology

Influenced by the foreign language learning performance in junior and senior high school, emotional and personality differences, some learners lack confidence in oral expression and think that they are not born to learn Italian. Faced with such a situation, learners should take the initiative to encourage themselves and build up their self-confidence, and teachers should take the initiative to give them affirmation and encouragement in order to enhance their sense of achievement and positive emotions. Some learners feel nervous and anxious when expressing themselves orally, fearing that they will be criticised by the teacher or ridiculed by their classmates if they make mistakes. These learners can consciously remind themselves to relax and not to see oral expression as a burden. Teachers should use more encouraging language when students' oral expressions are poor. When pointing out expression errors, don't show seriousness and forcefulness, which can greatly reduce students' psychological pressure and anxiety. In addition, teachers can set up some reward systems so that students can get some small rewards regardless of the quality of their speeches in order to motivate them to speak boldly and create a relaxing atmosphere for their oral expressions. For learners with low self-esteem, teachers can encourage them to take an active part in the discussion, give them more hints of success, avoid over-correction of mistakes, do not easily hit the students' self-esteem, and create as much as possible opportunities for them to achieve success, so that the learners will gradually change from passive to active in oral expression<sup>[3]</sup>.

## 7. Conclusion

With the deepening trend of social development and economic globalisation, learning and proficiently using a foreign language for all kinds of communication has become an indispensable skill and demand for more and more people. For foreign language teachers, only by grasping the individual differences in students' characteristics can they better teach foreign language speaking. Foreign language learners can only fully understand their own learning characteristics in order to continuously improve their oral expression ability, so that they can better play their important role as a bridge between their home country and the target country.

## Acknowledgement

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**Appendix:** <https://www.wjx.cn/vm/wFPvHNr.aspx#>; <https://www.wjx.cn/vm/e6AT8n6.aspx#>; <https://www.wjx.cn/vm/h46Itgq.aspx#>

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