

# Analysis of the Difficulties Encountered By Chinese Learners While Learning Italian from A Phonetic, Morphological and Syntactic Point of View

Qian He

University for Foreigners of Siena, Siena 53100, Italy

**Abstract:** With the development of Sino-Italian bilateral cooperation, more and more people start to learn Italian in China. This thesis analyzes some of the phonetic, morphological and syntactic problems encountered by Chinese students in the process of learning Italian, and proposes effective teaching strategies and methods for the teaching difficulties, in order to promote the development of Italian teaching in a cross-cultural environment.

**Keywords:** Italian language teaching, intercultural communication, teaching strategies.

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of Sino-Italian relations and the increasing exchanges and cooperation between the two countries, there is a growing demand for Italian language learning in China. In China, more and more schools, universities and language training institutes have started to offer Italian language teaching courses. Learners can access Italian learning resources through a variety of channels such as school programs, private training courses and online education platforms. Many universities and educational institutions have established cooperative relationships with Italian universities and cultural institutions to carry out a series of exchange programs, including student exchanges, visiting scholars programs, cultural exchange activities, etc., providing students with more opportunities to get in touch with the Italian language and culture.

## 2. Difficulties Encountered by Chinese Students in The Process of Learning Italian

### (1) From the phonetic aspect

The vowel system of Standard Italian consists of seven phonemes: /a/ , /ɛ/ , /e/ , /i/ , /ɔ/ , /o/ , /u/. These seven vowel phonemes occur in stressed syllables and are reduced to five /a, e, i, o, u/ in unstressed syllables. The Chinese vowel system consists of five phonemes: /i/, /u/, /y/, /ə/, /a/. The phoneme system of Italian differs from that of Mandarin in many ways. For example, the occluded consonants of Italian can be either clear or turbid. In contrast, Chinese occluded consonants are categorized as either with or without airflow through them. It is difficult for Chinese students to distinguish between clear and turbid consonants. This is because both aspirated and non-aspirated consonants in Chinese are clear consonants, unlike Italian.

The Italian trill /r/ does not exist in Chinese, so it is especially difficult for Chinese students who are just starting to learn Italian to pronounce it correctly, and many of them will pronounce /l/ instead of /r/. Italian has open and closed syllables for mid vowels, whereas Chinese does not, so

Chinese students will have more difficulty in distinguishing between open and closed vowels.

### (2) From the morphological aspect

Italian is a inflectional language, which means that the form of words can change, thus reflecting changes in person, number, sex, tense and voice, for example, the verb “parlare” has six person inflections (io parlo, tu parli, egli parla, noi parliamo, voi parlate, loro parlano) , with seven tenses: direct (Indicativo), virtual (Congiuntivo), conditional (Condizionale), infinitive (Infinito), imperative (Imperativo), participial (Participio), and subjunctive (Gerundio). Unlike Italian and many other Indo-European languages, Chinese does not have verb morphing or noun endings, and words do not change shape to indicate gender, number, tense, or case.

There are three types of verbs in Italian: transitive, intransitive, and self-referential. And there is no self-reversing verb in Chinese. Due to the existence of regular and irregular verbs, the conjugation of Italian verbs is another difficulty for us Chinese students. However, in Chinese, verbs do not change in form, only adding or changing the subject to reflect the performer of the action.

For Chinese students, the sex of names in Italian is also an aspect that needs to be memorized well. This is because in Chinese, there is no distinction between masculine or feminine nouns. Instead, Italian has both masculine and feminine genders, such as “ragazza” (femminile, singolare) and “ragazzo” (maschile, singolare). When it comes to the number of nouns, the singular and plural of Italian nouns is reflected by the variation of their endings, such as “ragazzo” (maschile, singolare) and “ragazzi” (maschile, plurale), which are usually in the form ending in “o,a,i,e”. In addition, Italian nouns are also gender-counted, such as ragazzi simpatici (maschile plurale) and ragazze simpatiche (femminile plurale). In Chinese, the singular and plural of nouns are mainly reflected by the occurrence of numerals and quantifiers.

### (3) From the syntactic aspect

The flexibility of Italian word order is a challenge that many Chinese students face when learning Italian. In contrast to Chinese, which usually has a fixed word order (e.g. subject-verb-object structure), Italian is more flexible and can change the word order to express different semantic emphases.

In Italian, changes in grammatical structure can significantly alter the meaning and tone of a sentence. This means that the same words can be combined in many ways to produce different semantic interpretations. This flexibility can be confusing for learners, especially for Chinese students who are used to a fixed word order. For example, consider the following simple Italian sentence: “Io amo te” (I love you). In this sentence, “Io” (I) is the subject, “amo” (love) is the verb, and “te” (you) is the object. However, if the word order is changed to “Te amo io”, this does not change the basic meaning of the sentence, but emphasizes the fact that “I” is the originator of the action, which enhances the emotional color of this love. This flexibility makes the Italian language more vivid and rich, but it also makes it more difficult for learners to understand and use.

A common sentence structure in Italian is subject-verb-object (SVO), which is the most common sequence in affirmative sentences, e.g. “Mario (soggetto) mangia (verbo) la mela (oggetto)”. The usual order in interrogative or emphatic sentences is verb-subject-object (VSO), e.g. “Mangia Mario la mela?” and “Mangia Mario la mela.”, which both of two phrases emphasize the action of “eating”. This subject-object-verb (SOV) order is common in many languages, but less so in Italian. However, it can also be used in subordinate clause structures or in more complex sentences, such as “Il cane (soggetto) l'osso (oggetto) mangia (verbo)”. In many sentences, the direct object usually precedes the indirect object, e.g., “Lei dà (verbo) un libro (oggetto diretto) a Maria (oggetto indiretto)”. Italian adverbs of time and place can be placed either at the beginning or at the end of a sentence, but usually after the verb, e.g., “Lui va (verbo) sempre (avverbio di tempo) al parco (avverbio di luogo)”. In addition, adverbs of manner and frequency usually follow the main verb. For example, “Loro parlano (verbo) fluentemente (avverbio di modo) e frequentemente (avverbio di frequenza)”.

For learners who are used to a fixed word order, understanding and mastering this flexibility in word order takes time and practice. Through reading, listening training and speaking practice, students can gradually familiarize themselves with the scenarios in which different word orders are used and learn to choose the appropriate word order according to context and intention.

### 3. Teaching Strategies

(1) Immersion in Italian from listening, speaking, reading and writing

As an Italian teacher, you need to carefully choose Italian teaching materials that meet the requirements of the curriculum and the level of students, and adjust and optimize them according to teaching needs. Teachers need to make sure that the content of the materials is interesting and close to students' lives and interests. According to the QCER guidelines (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), teachers should classify students into six levels, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, according to the language test of the CILS, and choose appropriate Italian teaching materials for students. Teachers should design challenging and practical tasks for students to practice through the activities and exercises in the materials to improve their language skills. Tasks may include conversation practice, listening comprehension, oral expression, etc. By simulating real-life

situations, such as shopping, traveling, eating in restaurants, etc., students can apply what they have learned in a virtual Italian environment and improve their language coping skills.

Teachers should also focus on interaction and communication among students, promote language exchange and cooperation among students through group discussions, role-playing, cooperative projects, etc., and cultivate their team spirit and communicative competence; provide a timely and effective feedback mechanism to help students identify and correct language problems, and promote their progress and growth. Teachers need to conduct regular assessments and tests to check students' learning outcomes and adjust teaching strategies according to the assessment results.

With the support of multimedia resources and audio-visual materials, such as Italian movies, music and radio programs, teachers can stimulate students' interest in listening and improve their listening comprehension and speech perception.

In addition teachers can design targeted reading materials and reading tasks, including Italian newspapers, magazines, Internet articles, etc., to help students expand their vocabulary, improve their reading comprehension and cultural literacy; organize writing training courses to guide students to practice Italian writing, including diaries, essays, situational dialogues, etc., to cultivate their writing skills and expression ability.

(2) Attractions of Italian culture in life experience

By organizing students to participate in field trips and excursions to Italian-speaking countries, teachers can let them experience the charm of Italian language and culture. By visiting places of interest, art galleries and museums, students can have a more intuitive understanding of Italian history, culture and art, and at the same time improve their Italian communication skills.

Teachers organize colorful Italian cultural activities on campus, including Italian food festivals, film screenings, and art performances. By participating in these activities, students can experience the unique charm of Italian culture and enhance their interest in and understanding of the Italian language and culture.

By creating an Italian language exchange platform online, students have the opportunity to have real language exchange and practice with native Italians. Italian students or volunteers can be invited to the school to conduct exchange activities, or to communicate with Italian people remotely through online platforms to promote students' oral expression and listening comprehension skills.

### 4. Conclusion

In recent years, there is a growing demand for compound foreign language talents in China. In Italian language teaching, teachers can improve students' Italian language level from phonology, morphology and syntax, improve students' Italian language communication ability and cross-cultural communication ability, so as to adapt to the needs of the development of modern society.

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