IMPLICIT ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHINESE-ACCENTED ITALIAN AT SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

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INTRODUCTION

In Linguistics, the term **accent** indicates the acoustical characteristics of speech that retain an indexical value for what concerns the speaker's origin and ethnic affiliation (see, e.g., Munro, 1998; Jilka, 2000).

Despite the increasing exposition to speakers with different linguistic backgrounds, forms of social bias towards accent-speaking subjects continue to be widespread across contemporary societies (see Blanchet & Clerc Conan, 2018). The aim of this study is to explore linguistic attitudes in educative istitutions in Tuscany, a region that counts growing multiethnicity in social composition. In particular, the Chinese community appears to be well-established (56,084 unities in 2019*).

Chinese-accented Italian thus represents a particularly suitable variety for the testing of **implicit attitudes**. Implicit attitudes are introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experiences that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995); these constructs show **greater resistance** in being oriented by environmental solicitations and they are slower to change (see Wilson, Lindsey, Schooler, 2000).

DATASET

Experimental population (two distinct campaigns):
1. Teaching staff of five high schools in Florence and Prato (N = 98).
2. Professors (N = 28) and students (N = 18) of several University departments in Tuscany.

Factors:
- Role: [HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS | UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS | UNIVERSITY STUDENTS]
- Exposition to multilingualism:
  - [PROFESSORS TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES | OTHER]
  - [STUDENTS WITH MULTIPLE LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES | OTHER]

HYPOTHESES

H_1 Italian-native subjects show a general negative attitude towards foreign accented Italian.

H_2 Despite different roles (student or educator), subjects who share the same social, cultural and educative context show a same trend concerning implicit attitudes.

H_3 Factors traditionally associated with more positive attitudes towards foreigners (exposition to multicultural-multilingual contexts) are uninfluential in shaping the orientation and entity of implicit attitudes in academic participants.

METHOD: The *Implicit Association Test*

The **Implicit Association Task** (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) is a widely used cognitive-behavioral paradigm that measures the strength of automatic (implicit) associations between concepts in people's minds.

In an IA Test, participants are asked to categorize stimuli into four predetermined polar categories (two targets and two attributes) via keystroke presses. The protocol is intended to create an overlap of elaborations that highlights the existence of an unconscious association between a category and a target.

The strength of an association between concepts is measured by the standardized mean difference score of the 'hypothesis-inconsistent' pairings and 'hypothesis-consistent' pairings (**d-score**, Greenwald, Nosek & Banaji 2003). In general, the higher the d-score the stronger the association between the 'hypothesis-consistent' pairings (decided by the experimenter). Negative d-scores suggest a stronger association between the 'hypothesis-inconsistent' pairings.

Italiano	Cinese
o	o
Buono	Cattivo
	Indifferenza

PRETEST: The pre-test, carried out in the form of an on-line survey, asked participants to guess the origin of a subject after listening to short, spoken excerpts. A total of 85 participants took part in this pre-testing phase (see Calamai, Ardolino, 2020).

Samples spoken by the Chinese subject were recognized as performed by a native Chinese speaker with a high accuracy (from 82.7 to 97.5% of the answers) in sentences documenting the simplification of the alveolar trill /r/ uttered as an alveolar flap /ɾ/, or as an alveolar lateral approximant /l/. In these sentences, the substitution of the trill phone was indicated as the first and the most recognizable trait of Chinese-accented Italian (50 to 85% of the answers).

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1
T-test (mu > 0.35): m = 0.418, ds = 0.424, p = 0.02*

Hypothesis 2
T-test (mu > 0.15)
School Teachers: m 0.417, s 0.412 – $p < 0.0001$***
University Professors: m 0.420, s 0.423 – $p < 0.001$**
University Students: m 0.377, s 0.426 – $p < 0.01$*
TOST
School Teachers vs. University Professors – $p < 0.0001$***
University Professors vs. University Students – $p < 0.0001$***

Hypothesis 3
Linear Regression
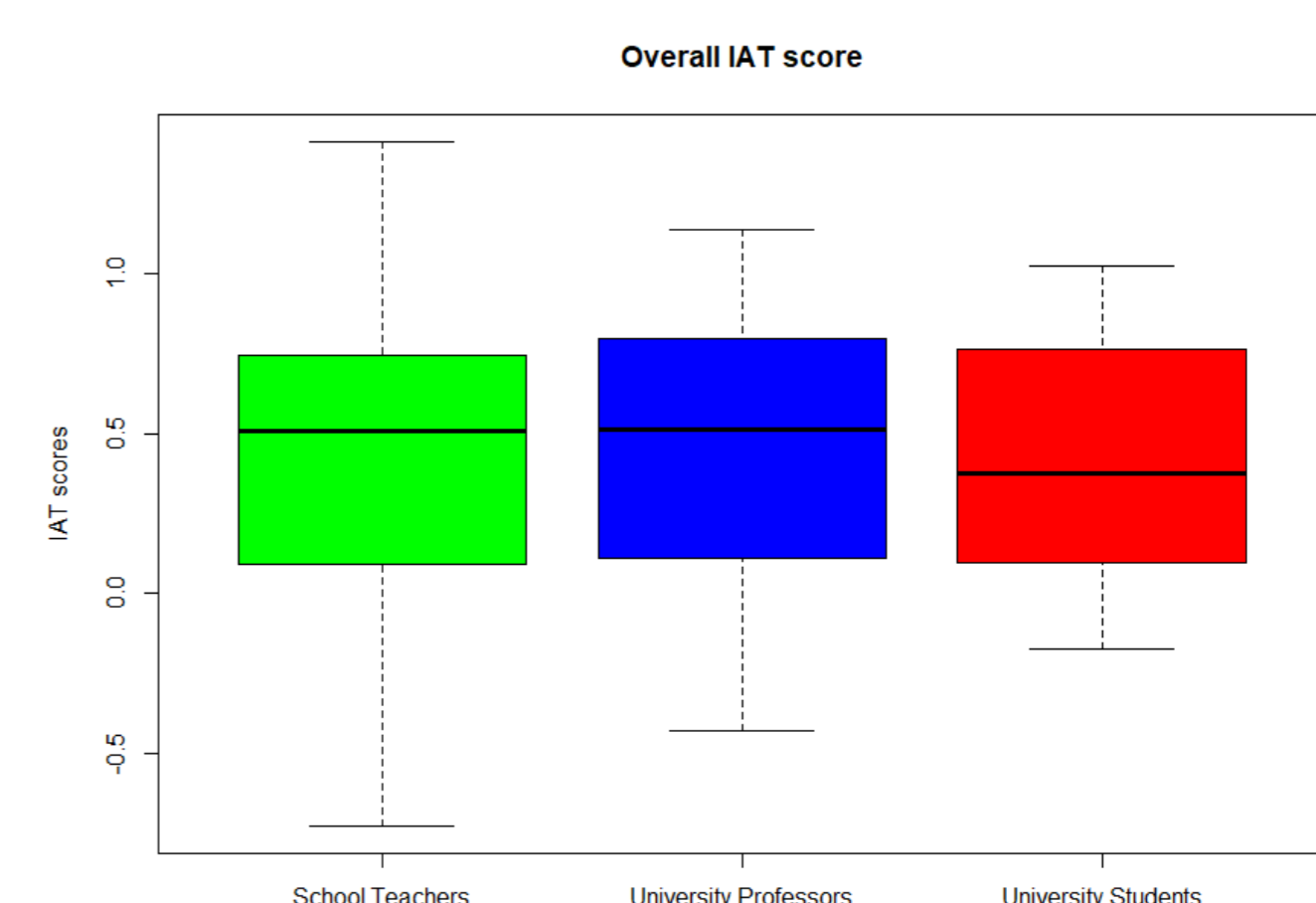$F_{(141)} = 0.001$, $R_{adj} = -0.01$, p = 0.99
TOST
University Professors [+ m.ling] vs.
    University Professors [-m.ling]: $p < 0.0001$***
University Students [+ m.ling] vs.
    University Students [-m.ling]: $p < 0.005$**

Overall IAT score

CONCLUSIONS

The issues raised in the study are far from being marginal, given the fact that **i)** accents impede communication (Lippi Green, 1997), and **ii)** in the globalized business environment labelled by Blommaert (2009) as 'market of accents', pronunciation appears to be "the key to obtaining the jobs one deserves and earning the money one is entitled to". To understand how accents are evaluated in different social arenas is therefore relevant, especially in a country which has just become a land of immigration.

Datasets analysis seems to confirm the three hypotheses:
a) The IAT scores distribution for all the participants is significantly positive (>0.35); therefore, the general trend is to strongly associate Chinese-accented Italian and negative concepts.
b) The scores' distributions for each role factor (SCHOOL TEACHERS, UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS and UNIVERSITY STUDENTS) are significantly equivalent.
c) The so-called «multilingualism» factor (University professors teaching foreign languages, students' fluency in more than one foreign language) does not show a role in shaping significant differences in IAT scores.

Despite these results, some questions require deeper investigations:
a) Does the negative association regard Chinese-accented Italian specifically, or does it involve more generally all foreign-accented varieties? Ongoing multidimensional enquiries will consider involving different accents.
b) Are negative attitudes able to produce a behavioral correlate that might be potentially relevant for educational outcomes?

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* https://www.tuttitalia.it/toscana/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2019/.