Exploration on Italian Language Teaching by "We-Media" in the Mobile Internet Era:Taking "Himalaya FM" App as an example

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Abstract

In the background of the mobile internet era, "We-Media" technologies are changing the traditional information transmission mode. The author chose the online mobile audio sharing platform "Himalaya FM" App that develops the fastest as the carrier, and conducts new exploration into Italian language teaching practices based on the connectivism learning theories, theories of practice, and contradiction theories. According to data analysis between 2014-2018, this paper puts forward Italian language teaching suggestions to further promote more professional, systematic and scientific integration of Italian language teaching and "We-Media" technologies.

Key words: Mobile Internet; "We-Media"; Italian teaching; "Himalaya FM" App

INTRODUCTION

In 2003, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis authoritatively defined the "We-Media" as the transmission route used by the ordinary populace to provide and share their real thoughts and their own news during their participation in production, after digital technologies are enhanced and connected to global knowledge systems in the *We-Media—How Audience are Affacting the Future's News and Information.* (Chen, 2017). The advent of the "We-Media" era changes the traditional information transmission mode and realizes transformation from transmission and intercast (Shi & Wang, 2016).

In the We-Media era, the public are also participants, producers, information providers, sharers and transmitters. In the context of non-privatization of Chinese media, the "We-Media" in China is different from those in other countries, and has the non-official nature (Chen, 2017).

From the early form of the website fanfou.com, created by Wang Xing in May, 2007, and also the first Chinese social network with many characteristics of Weibo, the latter of which appeared much later, to the launching of Tencent taotao.com in August, 2007, the "We-Media" entered in China. However, it is not until the emergence of Sina Weibo that the "We-Media" aroused concern. Youku and Tudou originating from UGC[1]（User Generated Content）attracted a large number of users.

The Canadian media theorist and ideologist Marshall McLuhan(2011) thinks that the media is message; no We-Media products can be developed without the support of advanced media technologies and products. The medium serves as a channel, without which "A good spring never flows to a destination". In the We-Media era, the mobile Internet develops rapidly, making overall flow guidance through the medium matrix a general trend (Chen, 2017).

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[1]An Internet term, abbreviated for User Generated Content. UGC emerges along with the Web2.0 concept mainly featuring individuation, that's, the Internet users display their DIY contents on the Internet platform or provide to other users.

1. TECHNOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.1 Mobile Internet

Since 1994 when the Internet was officially connected in China, the Internet has significantly affected our country and embraced many milestones made by China during its development of 24 years. The achievements are made based on innovation. The report of the 19th CPC National Congress pointed out that innovation is the first driving force for development and provides strategic support for building a modern economic system. The *40th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China* (hereinafter referred to as the Report) issued by CNNIC on August 4, 2017 showed that the Internet users in China had reached to 751 million by June, 2017, accounting 1/5 of total global Internet users. The penetration of the Internet was 54.3%, 4.6 percentage points higher than the global average level, of which the mobile Internet users accounted for 96.3%, reinforcing the Internet's dominant position. As of June 2017, China's mobile Internet users recorded 724 million, increasing by 28.3 million from the number at the end of 2016. The proportion using mobile phones to surf the Internet increased from 95.1% at the end of 2016 to 96.3%, and persons surfing the Internet with mobile phones kept increasing. As the same time, the number of IPv4 addresses in China reached 338 million while that of IPv6 addresses reached 21,283 blocks/32 addresses, both of which ranked the second globally in terms of total volume. The number of websites in China was 5.06 million, up by 4.8% in the first half of the year; international outgoing bandwidth was 7,974,779 Mbps, a growth of 20.1% as compared to the end of 2016.

1.2 "Himalaya FM" App (Hereinafter Referred to as "Himalaya")

Launched in on March 2013, Himalaya's mobile client has reached over 400 million[2] in terms of the user scale and become the largest online mobile audio sharing platform in China that develops the fastest, forming a PUGC[3] ecosystem (Zhou, 2016). During a year and a half since its launching, "Himalaya" has been downloaded for 150 million times. Moreover, it took the foreign Internet Radio of the same kind- Sound cloud five years to accumulate 10 million voices, while "Himalaya" only took one year (Liu, 2016).

Through the audio-on-demand (VOD) mode, this app aggregates the audience's fragmentation time and introduces social mechanisms to help the audience communicate and exchange during the listening process and connect various social platforms such as WeChat and Weibo.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

According to Marxist philosophical principle and practice-determinism, practice is the source of theory, the fundamental force driving the development of theories, the ultimate goal of theories and the only criterion to test truth; Theories in turn actively affect the practice. The ultimate goal of theories is to better guide practice, and the truth and scientific theories greatly promote the practice.

With the popularization and upgrading of the Internet and the widespread application of computer-based information technologies, learning is increasingly breaking through the unipolarity of traditional categories and hierarchical organizational structure, realizing the dual flow of information and causing fast changes in various learning-related links. The connectivism learning theory proposed by the Canadian scholar - George Siemens after integration of the chaos theory, network theory, complexity theory and self-organization theory, attracts more and more attention. And the Italian language teaching with "Himalaya"app in the context of mobile Internet is explored under the guidance of this theory.

3. ITALIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICE

Since 2012, the author has been working with Superstar to record the first Italian teaching video in China, use Camtasia studio[4] to record video information, and teach Italian through QQ, Weibo account, WeChat public account, develop the online Italy Language courses on open sourced network free of charge as well as cell phone Italian courses, use self-media matrix to display video, audio, text and other contents so as to meet diverse needs of the audience or the needs in various transmission scenarios. Based on the following advantages, more and more students tend to choose the mobile app - Himalaya FM to learn about Italy among many media:

(a) Cost-effective: The "Himalaya FM" App records voice audio, and spends rather low traffic costs compared with the general online video;

(b)Easy to use: The users can learn by listening to audio contents with their headsets at any time, with no other sense of limbs occupied, thus greatly improving students' frequency of learning in their free and "fragmented" time;

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[2] Data source: the official website of Himalaya FM-www.ximalaya.com

[3] PUGC(Abbreviated for Professional User Generated Content, meaning "contents generated by professional users" or "contents generated by experts". This Internet term refers to a production mode that integrates UGC+PGC in the mobile audio industry. PGC (Abbreviated for Professional User Generated Content) is an Internet term used to express "contents generated by professional users" (video websites) or "contents generated by experts"(Weibo). It broadly refers to content individualization, perspective diversification, communication democratization and virtual social relations and is also known as PPC (Professionally-produced Content).

[4] Camtasia Studio is a special tool used for recording screen motions.

(c)Simple operation: The interface of the "Himalaya FM" App is simple and operation-friendly. Among its strong functions, those most welcomed by students include downloading, resume listening, off-line listening, timed closing, search, etc. that facilitate interaction between students and teachers.

4. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

As of February 4, 2018, the author collected data and made relevant analysis on the "Italian Language Teacher Chunhong LIU" course recorded in "Himalaya FM". This programme is mainly targeted at non-professional Italian students, with details as follows:

Since the first programme in July 2014 till February 4, 2018, the number of fans reached 7,924, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Status Quo of the "Italian Language Teacher Chunhong LIU" Course

Total number of clicks to play	Number of followers	Number of subscribers	Completion rate
598384	7924	11583	68.89%

As the Italian language is a non-common language, the governments of China and Italy did not sign the agreement regarding mutual recognition of academic qualifications before 2005, which limited the number of students with non-Italian majors. On July 4, 2005, the Chinese and Italian governments signed the *Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Italy on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Degrees*, thus officially opening the door for Chinese students to further their study in Italy. In addition to its traditional international programs for students from all over the world, the Italy University reserved the learning quota for Chinese students respectively in the *Marco Polo Program* in 2005 for non-art students applying for the Italian general universities, and the *Turandot Program in* 2009 for students applying for Chinese art and music major in Italian art colleges. The *2012-2015 Implementation Plan on Education Cooperation between the Ministries of Education of the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Italian Republic* signed between two governments in 2012 laid a foundation for the all-round development of Sino-Italian education and teaching cooperation in the field of higher education so that the number of students furthering their studies in Italy (Liu, 2017) continued to increase, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
The Number of Students From P.R.C. in Italy in the Recent Ten Years

Year	Pre-registered Chinese students	Students from the Turandot Project	Students from the Marco Polo Project	International students (Non-EU)
2008	1136	0	766	370
2009	1640	130	969	541
2010	2110	447	991	991
2011	2679	743	994	672
2012	3518	1327	1152	942
2013	3699	1428	887	1274
2014	3762	1522	943	1251
2015	4138	1652	984	1502
2016	4401	1970	1003	1426
2017	4166	1530	992	1714

Source: the Education Center of the Italian Embassy and Consulate

The program is targeted at overseas students of non-Italian languages major that continue their studies in Italy. Therefore, a steady increase in the number of overseas students constitutes the basis for this program's increasing audience.

Table 3
Overview of the "Italian Language Teacher Chunhong LIU" Course

Album title	Type of the program	Production method	Number of episodes	Number of clicks to listen
Nuovo Progetto Italiano 2 Text MP3 II	Nuovo Progetto Italiano 2 Text II Taping	Reprinting	22	1341
Preparatory classes for students studying abroad (Explanation and analysis on grammatical difficult points)	Explanation and analysis on grammatical difficult points for preparatory classes for students studying abroad	Self-creating	12	1826
Taping of common irregular verb conjugation in Italian language	Taping of common irregular verb conjugation in Italian language	Self-creating	8	2094
Nuovo Progetto Italiano 2 Text MP3 I	Nuovo Progetto Italiano 2 Text I Taping	Reprinting	30	3251
Stories in Italian language	Intermediate vocabulary -Stories in Italian language	Reprinting	22	3824
Studying abroad in Italy	Introduction to policies related to studying abroad	Self-creating	6	4527
Songs in Italian language	Classic songs in Italian language	Reprinting	10	5785
Nuovo Progetto Italiano- Grammar explanation	Nuovo Progetto Italiano- Grammar explanation	Self-creating	15	10000
Word List - Chinese VS Italian	Fast and slow taping in Chinese and Italian of categorized Italian lexis	Self-creating	15	12000
Nuovo Progetto Italiano-Explanation on primary texts	Nuovo Progetto Italiano-Explanation on primary texts	Self-creating	11	13000
Pronunciation Guide to the Italian Language	Explanation on Italian language	Self-creating	13	14000
Studying the most useful Italian from pictures	Taping of studying the most useful Italian from pictures	Reprinting	62	19000
Explanation on daily dialogues in Italian	Explanation on daily dialogues by topic in Italian	Self-creating	22	20000
Speed-up program for Italian grammar explanation	Speed-up program for Italian grammar explanation	Self-creating	45	28000
Nuovo Progetto Italiano 2 -Intermediate vocabulary	Fast and slow taping in Chinese and Italian of categorized Italian Intermediate vocabulary	Self-creating	54	38000
MP3 Nuovo Progetto Italiano for basic-level students MP3	Taping of Nuovo Progetto Italiano for basic-level students	Reprinting	54	41000
Taping of daily dialogues in Italian	Fast and slow taping of daily dialogues by topic in Italian and Chinese	Self-creating	59	47000
Taping of Italian language speed-up program I-Text One to Text Nine	Taping of Italian language speed-up program I-Text One to Text Nine	Reprinting	51	48000
Brief analysis on Italian grammar	Explanation on Italian grammar	Self-creating	39	80000
Taping of Nuovo Progetto Italiano 1- New words list in Chinese and Italian	Fast and slow taping in Chinese and Italian of Italian words	Self-creating	74	2910000

From Table 3, it can be seen that the programs listened by more people have the following characteristics:

(a)The self-created programs have a higher number of audiences than those reprinting ones: Owing to the lagging and dispersion of the traditional information network, Italian teaching resources are unable to aggregate, while in current Web3.0 network technology environment, the Italian teaching can better match various teaching resources based on the needs of teachers, and provide personalized and customized contents during teaching. This addresses the fixed classroom and fixed time limits in previous teaching, helps students freely study according to their own needs and preferences, and enables students to conduct discussions and exchanges and submit homework through the network; in terms of teachers, this app allows them to digitize teaching syllabus, teaching plans, teaching courseware, teaching counseling, homework assignments, seminars, curriculum review and management notices based on different course needs, thus better realizing the driving, promotion and evaluation of teaching resources. However, in the network environment, it is likely to cause learned helplessness if there are no learning strategies to guide students in vast resources and effective and timely feedback on learning is not made. Therefore, to attract the audience, We-Media programs must develop originality, especially through developing de-massified programs according to audience characteristics so as to stabilize the listening rate.

(b)The knowledge programs have a higher number of audiences than those cultural ones: In recent years, the Italian language has added multimedia digital learning and teaching materials, including network and mobile terminal learning platforms. Currently, most websites offering Italian courses are generally offered by private schools

or education agents. In general, the content is relatively simple, and the course lacks organization and is repeated. Moreover, there lack targeted courses in depth as well as grammar practice contents. Most of them only offer the first few lessons free of charge, while more advanced courses are charged. In addition, some Italian language courses can also be found on some learning platforms and application software, such as iTunes, Podcast, WeChat account, Himalaya APP, etc. The construction practice regarding Italian We-Media resources needs to be explored in depth to make them more systematic, specialized and refined. Therefore, based on the analysis of existing Italian network information, the author has filled the lack of programs that deeply explain the knowledge of Italian grammar and cater to the audience's needs.

(c)The Italian programs for basic-level students have a higher number of audiences than those for medium-level ones: The program's target audience is the preparatory-course students of Italian language, most of whom are art students intending to go to Italy for undergraduate study after the college entrance examination, as shown in Table 4; these students are usually between 16-19 years old, and just participated in the college entrance examination. They have no work experience and no income, with their academic performance at the college entrance examination higher than 400 points. They have no basis for Italian language; have clear learning purpose, that is, passing the Italian grade examination of the Italy University. Most of the music colleges and universities in China don't set up the Italian language major, while many colleges and universities focus on art courses first, and then cultural courses, resulting in that students work harder on art courses instead of cultural ones. Through analyzing the preference and intensity of the students' perception, their habits of information processing, and motivation and physiological factors, the author recorded the programs suitable for students' levels and close to the students' cognitive zones.

Table 4
The Students' Reason for Choosing Italy

Motivation to study in Italy	Percentage
Study art	21%
Study vocal music	20%
Attracted by Italian culture	16%
Attracted by Italian design	12%
Attracted by Italian architecture	8%
Attracted by Italy, the country	7%
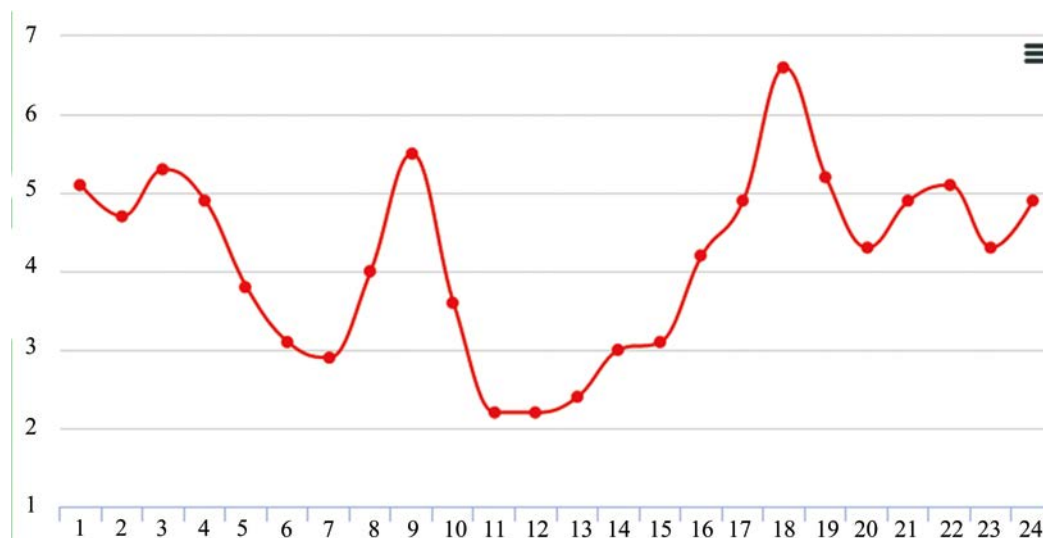
Table 5
Major Period of Listening to Those Programs

From Table 5 one can tell that the major periods of listening are respectively at 3:00 am, 9:00 am, and 18:00 (Beijing time). As the time difference between China and Italy in February 2018 was seven hours, it is 20:00 in Italy when it is 3:00 am in Beijing. This time is the Italian audience's study time at night. The other two peaks 9: 00 and 18:00 (Beijing time) are the peak hours for audience in China.

Table 6
Area Distribution of the Audiences

Main areas	Percentage
Zhejiang	31.23%
Beijing	18.38%
Jiangsu	12.88%
Guangdong	9.17%
Shanghai	3.98%
Sichuan	2.41%
Shandong	2.25%
Hebei	2.19%
Henan	1.77%
Hubei	1.61%
Others	14.13%

From Table 6, it can be seen that the audience are concentrated in economically-developed regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. In these regions, the economic and cultural exchanges with foreign countries are more frequent than those in other regions. The parents of students in these regions have higher knowledge levels and incomes, promoting the concentration of Italian teaching in these areas. At present, there are 12 cities in China setting Italian university courses, of which there are 5 universities in Beijing, 1 university in Shanghai, 1 university in Chongqing and 1 university in Tianjin. Most of them are concentrated in big cities. The Italian courses set in Beijing account for 42% across China, while six Italian classes are opened in Southern China, among which four are located in Shanghai. The data fully proves that the development of Italian language is mainly distributed in political and economic centers, indicating that the political and economic factors play an important role in promoting the opening of Italian class. However, the political factors, on the other hand, play a more significant role in promotion, which is mainly benefiting from the multi-channel support of Chinese and Italian agencies at all levels (Liu, 2017).

With joint efforts of the governments of Italy and China, the paths to study in Italy become simpler while the options are more diverse, transforming from single art and design areas to machinery, electronics, finance, etc. The exchanges and cooperation between two countries facilitate the growing, sprouting and flowering of Italian teaching in China and the booming of Italian teaching cultivates batch after batch of high-qualified talents for promoting exchanges and cooperation. These two aspects are mutually reinforced to realize common development.

Through investigation, in addition to traditional vocal music, design, architecture, fine arts, linguistics, law, philosophy and cultural relic restoration majors, the audience in following majors appeared: Materials Science, Mining Engineering, Vehicle Engineering, Urban and Rural Planning, Shipping and Marine Engineering, Cartography and Geographic Information Systems, Law and Economics, Business Administration, Optical Engineering, Aerospace Science and Technology, Chemical Engineering and Technology, Machine Building and Automation, Basic Veterinary Medicine, Transportation Planning and Management, Control Science and Engineering, Ecology Economics, Biomass Composites, Food Engineering, Mathematics and Applied Mathematics, Water Conservancy and Hydroelectric Engineering, Tunnel Engineering, Astrophysics, Communications and Information Engineering, Pharmacology, etc., reflecting increasingly deeper Sino-Italian cultural and education exchanges. Especially since 2012, in order to develop high-end talents in various fields, the China Scholarship Council, according to the *Outline of National Medium and Long-term Talents Development Plan*, set up the "Chinese Government Graduate Student Overseas Study Program", which selects postgraduates and PhDs in non-Italian majors from universities to further their study in Italy.

CONCLUSION

The development of We-Media provides a platform for teachers to create their own teaching programs, and enables them to record appropriate and targeted programs based on special circumstances of students. However, limited by heavy teaching tasks, the use bottlenecks of educational technologies, differences in students' learning habits and teachers' cognitions, as well as the lack of R&D teams, the application of We-Media teaching theories and practices have inevitable limitations, leading to the gap between actual teaching effects and expectations. Thus, we shall make further exploration and improvement to make the We-Media teaching more systematic, scientific and professional.

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