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The psychometric properties of the Italian translation of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude
toward Theistic Faith: A study across the age range 13- to 80-years

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Abstract

The Italian translation of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith was tested among a sample of 934 Italian-speaking participants (517 females and 417 males) between the ages of 13 to 80 years (mean age 30.1 years, $SD = 16.0$). The data supported the unidimensionality, internal consistency reliability and construct validity of the instrument and commended it for further use in contributing to comparative empirical research within the empirical psychology of religion.

Keywords: psychology of religion, attitude toward religion, psychometrics, Italy

Introduction

In a series of studies published during the late 1970s and 1980s Francis and colleagues set out to position the attitudinal dimension of religion at the heart of a comparative empirical psychology of religion (see Francis, 1978a, 1978b, 1989; Francis & Stubbs, 1987).

Conceptually it was argued that attitude gets closer to the heart of an individual's religion.

Empirically it was demonstrated that a measure of attitude works consistently across a wide age range and among participants from different cultural denominational backgrounds.

Originally the argument was tested in relation to the 24-item Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity within an English-speaking Christian and post-Christian cultural context (for review see Francis, 2009). Subsequently, the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity was made more accessible within an English-speaking context by the development of the short seven-item version (see Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Lester, & Brown, 1995). Both the 24-item form and the 7-item form have been translated into a number of different languages, including including Arabic (Munayer, 2000), Czech (Francis, Quesnell, & Lewis, 2010), Chinese (Tiliopulous, Francis, & Jiang, 2013), Dutch (Francis & Hermans, 2000), French (Lewis & Francis, 2003), German (Francis & Kwiran, 1999), Greek (Youtika, Joseph, & Diduca, 1999), Italian (Crea, Baiocco, Ioverno, Buzzi, & Francis, 2014), Norwegian (Francis & Enger, 2002), Portugese (Ferreira & Neto, 2002), Romanian (Francis et al., 2009), Serbian (Flere, Francis, & Robbins, 2011), Slovakian (Lewis, Adamovova, & Francis, 2008), Slovenian (Flere et al., 2008), Spanish (Campo-Arias et al., 2006), Swedish (Eek, 2001), and Welsh (Evans & Francis, 1996). The strength of a family of translations of the same instrument is that they facilitate comparable studies to be conducted in different linguistic and cultural contexts in order to explore the consistency of the correlates, antecedents, and consequences of individual differences in attitude toward Christianity.

In order to extend this research within contexts shaped by the other major Abrahamic faith traditions Sahin and Francis (2002) developed the Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam, and Francis and Katz (2007) developed the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism. The properties of the Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam have been subsequently tested by Francis, Sahin, and Al-Ansari (2006), Francis, Sahin, and Al-Failakawi (2008), Masharraf, Lewis, and Sultan (2014), and Francis, Tekke, and Robbins (2016). The properties of the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism have been subsequently tested by Yablon, Francis, and Robbins (2014), and Lumboso, Fayn, Tiliopoulos, and Francis (2016). The strength of a family of measures accessing the *same* understanding of the attitudinal dimension of religion within different religious traditions is that they facilitate comparable studies to be conducted among different religious groups in order to explore the consistency of the correlates, antecedents, and consequences of individual differences in attitude toward religion as expressed within different religious contexts (in this case Christianity, Islam, and Judaism).

While a family of instruments specifically designed to assess attitude toward Christianity, attitude toward Islam, and attitude toward Judaism facilitate comparable empirical studies within cultures largely shaped by these diverse traditions, Astley, Francis, and Robbins (2012) argued that for research in increasingly religiously plural societies, there would be value in developing a measure that could function across all three Abrahamic faith traditions. The Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith was designed for this purpose. Building on the short seven-item form of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, Astley, Francis, and Robbins (2012) identified seven items concerned with affective responses to God, places of worship, and prayer that they regarded as conceptually appropriate within a Christian context, an Islamic context, a Jewish context, and a post-Christian context. The psychometric properties of the new instruments were assessed on a

sample of 284 16- to 18-year-old students in England.

In a subsequent study, Francis, Brockett, and Village (2013) tested the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith among separate samples of Christian, Muslim and secular youth by administering the instrument in areas of England in which three groups were clearly visible. In this study data were provided by 4,353 students between the ages of 11 and 16 years attending schools in three areas of northern England: Blackburn, Kirklees, and York, among whom 1,367 were 'no religion', 1,984 were 'Christian', 817 were 'Muslim', 126 were 'other religion', and the remaining 59 had failed to answer the religious affiliation question. Francis, Brockett, and Village (2013) reported three separate analyses among the religiously unaffiliated, the Christian, and the Muslim participants. The instrument performed well among all three groups.

In a third study Francis and Lewis (2016) tested the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith among a sample of 10,678 13- to 15-year-old students from across the United Kingdom, exploring the performance of the scale independently among three groups: religiously unaffiliated students ($N = 3,711$), Christian students ($N = 6,649$), and Muslim students ($N = 318$). The data support the internal consistency reliability and the construct validity of this instrument among all three groups.

Against this background, the aim of the present study was to extend the reach of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith by developing and testing an Italian translation of the instrument, following the procedure that had been previously employed to develop and test the Italian translation of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Crea, Biacocco, Ioverno, Buzzi, & Francis, 2014).

Method

Procedure

Following the normal procedures of translation and back-translation to ensure the comparability between the English and Italian version of the instrument, the Italian translation of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith was located within a battery of other psychological tests. An opportunity sample of participants was drawn from all over Italy. As part of a research methods course, trainee psychologists (operating under the supervision of a senior psychologist within the Institute of Psychology at the Salesian University in Rome) were invited to administer a questionnaire to around ten diverse individuals. Participation was anonymous, and no monetary reward was offered or given. The informed consent procedure required written consent prior to participation, as agreed with the Ethics Commission of the Salesian University. Questionnaires were administered, mainly at home, in the presence of a trainee psychologist. A total of 96% of the questionnaires were returned.

Participants

Drawn from all over Italy, the sample comprised 934 participants (517 female and 416 males), ranging in age between 13 and 80 years (M age = 30.1; SD = 16.0); 401 participants were under the age of twenty, 207 in their twenties, 137 in their thirties or forties, and 189 were over fifty years of age.

Measures

Religious attitude was assessed by the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith (Astley, Francis, & Robbins, 2012). This scale comprises the following seven items: 'I find it hard to believe in God'; 'Prayer helps me a lot'; 'I think going to a place of worship is a waste of my time'; 'I know that God is very close to me'; 'God helps me to lead a better life'; 'I know that God helps me'; and 'God means a lot to me'. Responses to each item were recorded on a five-point scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5). Negative items were reverse coded to compute the attitude

scale score. Scores can range between 5 and 35, with higher scores indicating a more positive attitude to theistic faith.

Belonging to a religion was assessed on a two-point scale: yes (1) or no (2).

Frequency of church attendance was assessed on a seven-point scale: Several times a week (7), almost every week (6), at least once a month (5), at least 6 times a year (4), once a year (3), sometimes (2), and never (1).

Analysis

The data was analysed by SPSS using the frequency, correlation, reliability, and factor routines.

Results

Table 1 presents the item rest-of-test correlation coefficients in respect to all seven items, together with the alpha coefficient (first column) and the loadings on the first factor of the unrotated solution proposed by principal component analysis, together with the percentage of variance explained (second column). The alpha coefficient is established as .95, while the proportion of variance accounted for by the first factor is established as 76.6 %. These data support the conclusion that the scale is characterised by homogeneity, unidimensionality, and internal consistency reliability within the sample.

- insert table 1 about here -

Construct validity of the instrument was assessed in terms of its association with personal factors (age and sex) and with measures of personal religiosity (religious affiliation and church attendance). The ANOVA analyses showed significant differences between females ($M = 24.4$; $SD = 7.3$) and males ($M = 23.1$; $SD = 8.4$), $F(1, 933) = 5.9$, $p < .01$; significant differences between the mean score of younger (13-22 years of age) ($M = 22.2$; $SD = 7.4$) and older (23 onwards years of age), ($M = 25.7$; $SD = 7.9$), $F(1, 933) = 46.9$, $p < .001$; and significant differences between those affiliated with a religious group ($M = 25.4$;

$SD = 6.9$) and those not affiliated with a religious group ($M = 15.5$; $SD = 7.5$), $F(1,928) = 241.7$, $p < .001$. In the present study, scores recorded on the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith correlated with church attendance ($r = .67$, $p < .001$).

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to extend the reach of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith by developing and testing an Italian translation of this instrument, following the procedure that had been previously employed to develop and test the Italian translation of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Crea, Biacocco, Ioverno, Buzzi, & Francis, 2014). Drawing on data provided by an opportunity sample of 934 Italian speaking participants between the ages of 13 to 80 years drawn from all over Italy, the analyses support the factor structure, the internal consistency reliability and item homogeneity of this 7-item instrument. Examination of differences in mean scale scores between males and females and between younger and older participants support the construct of the instrument in the sense that these differences are consistent with the wider research literature suggesting that females report a more positive attitude toward religion than males (Francis & Penny, 2014), that younger people report a less positive attitude toward religion than older people (Voas & Bruce, 2019; Voas & Chaves, 2016). The construct validity of the Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith is also supported by the findings that those who are religiously affiliated and those who attend church record more positive attitudes toward religion than those who are not religiously affiliated and those who do not attend church (Francis, 2009). The instruments can be recommended for further use within Italian context and should contribute to comparative empirical research within the psychology of religion across linguistic communities.

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Table 1

Astley-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith: Scale properties

	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>
I find it hard to believe in God*	.79	.85
Prayer helps me a lot	.83	.87
I think going to a place of worship is a waste of my time*	.63	.70
I know that God is very close to me	.88	.92
God helps me to lead a better life	.90	.93
I know that God helps me	.91	.94
God means a lot to me	.90	.93
Alpha coefficient / % of variance	.95	77.6%

Notes: * = these negative items were reverse scored

r = correlation between the individual item and the sum of the other six items

f = factor loading