

A Survey Study: The Correlation between Introversion/Extroversion and Oral English Learning Outcome*

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Abstract—Introversion/extroversion is generally considered to be one of the most important factors affecting the success of foreign language learning, especially spoken language. Extroverts are usually thought to be better at learning a foreign spoken language than introverts. With the intention of finding out whether extroverts are better learners of spoken English (learned as a foreign language in China) than introverts, this study investigated 117 English majors' personality types (in terms of introversion and extroversion) in Chongqing (a municipality city in China), and their spoken English performance through a spoken English test. With the data collected, this paper analyzes the correlation between introversion/extroversion and spoken English performance. The result shows that the two are not correlated. The author discusses factors leading to this phenomenon from various aspects of learning environment, motivation, language intake and output, culture, and concludes that introversion/ extroversion is not a key factor contributing to the success of spoken English learning. The research result is of great significance to both English teachers and learners, especially those who are concerned about their personality (introversion) being a barrier to their oral English learning. What matters most in spoken English learning probably are the strategies that learners employ to improve it, which is well worth researching.

Index Terms— introversion/extroversion, spoken English, correlation

I. INTRODUCTION

Typical extroverts are generally depicted as “sociable, like parties, has many friends, has many friends, needs to have people to talk to, and does not like studying by himself. He craves for excitement, takes chances ... generally like change ...” while introverts as “quiet ... introspective, fond of books rather than people; he is reserved and distant, except with intimate friends ...” (Eysenck, 1965, p.59-60). Based on the basic components of extroversion/introversion and some findings of researches, psychologists have predicted that introverts have higher academic achievement than extroverts, which is actually supported by some educational research (Skehan, 1989, p.101).

However, in the area of applied linguistic research, this is not the case. In the eyes of many language teachers and learners, extroversion/introversion constitutes a major factor contributing to success or failure in language learning (Naiman et al.'s, 1978; Griffiths, 1991), however, it is generally held that extroversion is advantageous to foreign/second language learning, while introversion is disadvantageous to foreign/second language learning (Skehan, 1989, p.101). Sociability, outgoing and talkativeness, essential and indispensable features of extroversion, facilitate language learning by learners' getting more chances to practice and more input, hence learners become more successful in language learning, whereas reservation, shyness and self-restrain inhibit introverts from participating openly in the classroom and seeking out opportunities outside classroom to practice. This seems especially true of spoken language learning. Though it seems quite reasonable, empirical researches have not shown any clear relation between extroversion/introversion and language learning, whether extroversion or introversion helps or hinders success in language learning. Despite the vagueness in the relationship between extroversion/introversion and foreign/second language learning, there arise two major assumptions in regard to the relationship between extroversion/introversion and foreign/second language learning. One is that extroversion is positively correlated with Basic Interpersonal

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Communication Skill (BICS); the other is that introversion help learners develop cognitive academic language ability (CALP) faster than extroverts (Ellis, 1994, p.520). However, as are shown in the findings of the previous researches (Rossier, 1975; Busch, 1982; Carrell, Prince & Astika, 1996; Kiany, 1998; Dewaele & Furnham, 1999; Kubota, 2003), whether introversion/extroversion is directly related to success in language learning cannot be concluded (Arnold, 1999).

This paper is to study, in the context of an inland city of China, where English is learned as a foreign language, whether introversion/extroversion of learners is correlated with the outcome of their spoken English ability, and discuss the reasons contributing to the study result.

II. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

A. Research Questions

1. What's the correlation between students' personality (in terms of introversion/extroversion) and their oral English ability?
2. What are the possible factors leading to the study result?

B. Subjects

Due to the restraint of finance, time and personnel, also for the convenience of the study, students of the researchers and of their colleagues were chosen as the subjects for the present study. The students are all freshmen majoring in English, who have been studying in university for almost one year. The total number of the students is 117, 93 of who are female, 24 males. Their age ranges from 18 to 21, with average age of 20.1. They all have been learning English for more than 7 years. All 117 were given a questionnaire of personality and an oral English test.

C. Instruments

1. Instrument for investigating learners' personality (introversion/ extroversion)

The validity and reliability of the instruments used to measure personality variable in some studies has been doubted (Ellis, 1994). Some used the instrument developed by psychologists and tested extensively, such as: Coan and Cartell's Early School Personality Questionnaire, Yatabe/Gruiford Personality Inventory, Eysenck Personality Inventory; others used instrument devised specifically for use with language learning, for example, Ely's and Gardner and Lamber's questionnaires. Ellis (1994) thought "it is not always clear that these instruments measure what they purport to measure" (p.519). Discrepancies might arise between the students' true personality and the results of the self-report questionnaire. If the results are invalid, they can by no means be accepted as genuine. Also, Strong (1983) suggested that better results may be obtained when the measure of extroversion/introversion are based on observation than when they are based on self-report questionnaires. However, as Ellis pointed out that "the effects of extroversion/introversion may be situation-dependent, evident in some learning context but not in others".

Based on the above reasons, in order to "compile a more complete picture" (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p.122) of participants' personality types, the present study first adopted as the self-report questionnaire the adapted version of Eysenck Introversion-extroversion Scale made by Gong Yaoxian for Chinese, which has been subjected to extensive testing and widely used in China, to investigate subjects' personality. However, in this research the result of the questionnaire is not the only decisive element for the understanding of students' personality. On the basis of the result of self-report questionnaire, the researcher also considered teachers' and fellow students' observation and subjects' own judgment of their personality type for the final judgment of the subjects' personality (introversion/extroversion).

The questionnaire consists of 21 questions requiring participants to answer "YES" or "NO". To determine what personality type the subject is, first of all, raw scores are counted based on his answers to the 21 questions. According to the assessment standard, the responses to the statements are assigned values "1" for "Yes", "0" for "No" (with reverse value for question number 7, 9, and 13). Then the raw scores are converted to T scores according to different criteria based on their sex and age. According to the test manual, personality types are clearly divided in the following standard: introvert ($T \leq 38.5$), Introvert-extrovert ($38.5 < T \leq 61.5$), and extrovert ($T > 61.5$). The higher the T score is, the more extroverted a person is.

In addition to the 21 Yes/No questions, a personal-information part is attached to the questionnaire, which contains 4 blank-filling items and 2 multiple-choice items. It reveals the subjects' name, sex and birth-date; their identification of their own personality types and their opinion on the influence of personality types on oral English learning.

2. Instrument for investigating learners' oral English ability

The test of oral communicative ability in English follows the format of CET (College English Test) Spoken English Test. The test is divided into three parts. Part I consists of an interaction between the candidates and the examiner, which lasts about 5 minutes. Part II consists of an interaction among three candidates in a group, time of which approximates 10 minutes. Part III involves further questions from the examiner to double check the candidates' oral ability, which is approximately 5 minutes. In the test, the candidate is required to take part in oral interactions as specified in the test paper.

The candidate's ability in spoken English is measured on the basis of his/her performance in the test. The candidates' performance is assessed by the examiners using the following assessment criteria: accuracy in the production of the

forms of the language (individual sounds, stress/intonation, grammatical and lexical features); range of vocabulary and grammatical structures which the candidate makes use of; size of contribution which the candidate makes; discourse management, that is, the ability to produce extended and coherent discourse; flexibility of the candidate in dealing with different situation and topics; appropriacy in the use of linguistic resources to convey meaning in specific contexts.

After completing data collection, the descriptive statistics analyses were carried out with the software Excel 2003 and SPSS 13 for windows. Spearman correlation coefficient was used to test the correlation between personality types and oral English ability.

D. Data Collection

The first step was to test the subjects' oral English ability. The test was administered by three English teachers, who all taught the subjects Comprehensive English Course. One of them (the researcher) is an examiner of CET Spoken English Test appointed by CET Spoken English Test Committee; the other two examiners were guided by the authorized examiner of CET Spoken English Test to ensure that they would be using similar criteria in evaluating the students' oral performance. Before the test the students were told that their performance in the oral English test would account for certain percentage of the total score for the course to ensure that enough importance was attached to it. For the constraints of time and personnel, the test was administered individually by single examiner. Time and personnel limitation did not allow paired-examiners interviewing with 117 students.

The second step was to investigate the subjects' personality. The investigation of questionnaire was administered during the class time of Comprehensive English Course with the presence and supervision of their teachers and the researcher of this study, to ensure clear understanding of the questionnaire and no communication and discussion between students when answering the questionnaire. All 117 students responded to the questionnaire and returned the questionnaire sheets, however, to ensure that the analysis would be as accurate as possible, students who omitted answers on the questionnaires were excluded. At last, only 112 students' questionnaires were considered valid.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN ORAL ENGLISH PERFORMANCE AND PERSONALITY TYPES

A. Identification of the Subjects' Personality

The personality questionnaire starts with a personal-information part, in which the participants identified themselves with introverts, extroverts, or introvert-extroverts, and state their opinion about the influence of their personality on oral English learning, in addition to revealing their name, age and sex.

TABLE 1
SUBJECTS' SELF-EVALUATION AND QUESTIONNAIRE'S IDENTIFICATION OF SUBJECTS' PERSONALITY TYPES

	Self-evaluation (population)	Questionnaire (population)
introverts	13	6
extroverts	12	36
Introvert-extroverts	87	70
Total number	112	112

As can be seen from the table above, there's difference between participants' self-evaluation of personality types and questionnaire's evaluation.

Therefore, in order to get a complete and correct picture of the participants' personality, the researcher (under the guidance of her friend, who specializes in education psychology), taking students' self-evaluation, questionnaire's result, teachers and fellow students' observation into consideration, determined the participants' personality types. Below is a table showing the participants' personality types and their view of the influence of personality on oral English learning:

TABLE 2
SUBJECTS' PERSONALITY TYPES AND THEIR VIEW OF THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY TYPES ON ORAL ENGLISH LEARNING

Personality types	Opinion				Number/ percentage of each personality type
	Facilitating	Inhibiting	Facilitating & Inhibiting	No effects	
Introverts	0	6 / 66.7%	3 / 33.3%	0	9 / 8%
Extroverts	9 / 31%	1 / 3.4%	16 / 55.2%	3 / 10.3%	29 / 28%
Introvert-extroverts	4 / 5.4%	28 / 37.8%	36 / 48.7%	6 / 8.1%	74 / 64%
Total number	13 / 11.6%	35 / 31.3%	55 / 49.1%	9 / 8%	112

This table shows that among the 112 subjects, 9 are introverts, 29 extroverts and 74 introvert-extroverts, which account for 8%, 28% and 64% respectively. From the table an interesting phenomenon can be seen: none of the 9 introverts consider their personality type as a facilitating factor for oral English learning, while only one of the 29 extroverts regard their personality type as an inhibiting factor for oral English learning. 31% of the extroverted participants thinks that their personality is advantageous to oral English learning, which is quite similar to the result obtain by Naiman (1978). This result is consistent with people's common understanding of the influence of personality on oral English learning: extroversion is advantageous to oral English learning, whereas introversion is the other way round. Interestingly, later when the results of oral English test came out, the researcher found the three introverts who

think of their personality type both facilitating and inhibiting their oral English learning were all good oral English learners. This indicates that a right realization of and attitude toward one's personality will contribute to his oral English learning.

B. Identification of the Subjects' Achievement in Oral English Test

The total score for Spoken English Test is 15 points. According to the rating scale of Spoken English Test, Candidates whose point is between 14.5 and 15 can get A+, 13.5—14.4 A; 12.5—13.4 B+, 11—12.4 B; 9.5—10.9 C+, 8—9.4 C; and D for under 7.9 points. We define candidates with points over 12.5 (in other words those with A+, A or B+) as good learners of oral English (in terms of their level). Candidates with A+, A or B+ are described in the syllabus of CET Spoken English Test as "being able to communicate in familiar topics with almost no or little difficulties". Below is a table showing the total number of good oral English learners among 112 subjects and the number and percentage of good introverted learners and extroverted learners and introvert-extroverts.

TABLE 3
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF GOOD LEARNERS

	Total number	introverts	extroverts	Introvert-extroverts
All participants	112	9/8%	29/26%	74/66%
Good learners	47	4/9%	11/23%	32/68%

From the table it can be seen that the percentage of good learners of each personality type in good learners remains almost the same with the percentage of each personality type in all participants, especially the good introverted learners. It proves from one aspect that introverted learners have the same possibilities with extroverted learners to learn oral English well.

C. Correlation between Personality Types and Achievement in Oral English Test

To see how personality types are correlated with spoken English outcome, Spearman's rho, usually used for rank-order data, is employed to test the correlation. The subjects in this study are classified into three categories: introverts, extroverts and introvert-extroverts. The feature of the score of spoken English test and personality score meet the requirement for Spearman correlation coefficient. First, we change the score of spoken English test A+ into 1, A into 2, B+ into 3, B into 4, C+ into 5, C into 6; we use 1 to stand for extrovert, 2 for introvert-extrovert and 3 for introvert. Then, the data collected are entered into SPSS13 to find the Spearman correlation coefficient. The result is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
SPEARMAN CORRELATION COEFFICIENT OF ORAL ENGLISH TEST SCORE AND PERSONALITY TYPES

		Test	Personality
Spearman's rho	Test	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	112
	Personality	Correlation Coefficient	-.002
Sig. (2-tailed)		.986	
N		112	

The table shows that Spearman's correlation coefficient between the score of spoken English and personality types is -0.002, close to 0, which means the score of spoken English and personality type are not correlated. Therefore, we can say personality types have no or little influence on the outcome of learners' spoken English. This finding is contrary to the common understanding that the extroverts can learn oral English better than the introverts. The possible explanation is that the subjects chosen for the study, who are all English majors, are strongly motivated to study oral English well. And motivation propels them to find appropriate ways to improve their oral English. This finding indicates that the influence of introversion/extroversion on oral English learning is not as big as it is assumed.

IV. DISCUSSION

It is generally hypothesized that "extroverted learners will do better in acquiring basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)" (Ellis, 1994, p.521), for they are assumed to be more sociable to have more opportunities to practice, to access more input, thus more success in communication. Though substantial evidence has been found extroversion is linked to the acquisition of BICS (Ellis, 1994), the result of present study has proved that the oral English outcome of university English majors in an inland city of China for survey is not correlated with their personality types in terms of introversion/extroversion, which means both the introverts and the extroverts can equally achieve success in oral English learning. What result in this? The possible factors contributing to the result is discussed in the following.

A. Foreign Language Learning Setting

There is distinction between second-language acquisition and foreign-language learning. English can be learned either as a second language or a foreign language. In the situation where English is acquired as a second language, it is "spoken in the immediate environment of the learner" (Ringbom, 1980), whereas in the situation where English is

learned as a foreign language, English is “not spoken in the learner’s immediate environment” (Ringbom, 1980). This means in a second-language acquisition setting, learners have great opportunities to use English by partaking in the natural communication situations, while in a foreign-language learning setting, in addition to classroom learning (providing simulated language setting), learners have no or little opportunities to practice English in natural communication situations.

Learners of English in China learn English not as a second language but as a foreign language, a language different from the dominant language, Chinese, the overwhelming majority of people speak in China. Consequently, learners of English can hardly find any occasions outside classroom where they can use English. With the advance of technology, learners can read English and listen to or watch English online or elsewhere, but the mass media just provide opportunities for practicing receptive skills. Though China has been carrying out open-door policy, more and more speakers of English are living or traveling in China, for an inland city where the survey is conducted, natural English communication settings can still be hard to find, except English class or English Corner which is especially set up for learners of English to communicate and practice their spoken English. That extroversion is advantageous to oral English learning is based on the more opportunities for input and output practice. Therefore, despite the fact that extraverts, who tend to be more sociable, are more likely to join groups and inclined to engage in conversations outside the classroom (Swain, 1985), due to the shortage of foreign language learning settings in China, extraverts cannot be higher oral language input and output generators than introverts, as is claimed by many researchers (Krashen, 1985; Brown, 1987; Swain, 1993).

B. Language Intake and Output

As is mentioned above, extroverts are thought to be sociable to have more opportunities to interact with English speakers than introverts, thus have more language input and output. It is important that successful English learners have a large amount of input, exposure of English environment. However, input is far from enough ensuring success of language learning. What is entailed is “intake”, that is, the particular amount of an input that learners successfully process to build up internal understanding of the language, the limited amount of comprehensible part of the “input”. However, in oral communication, a large quantity of input are incomprehensible for English learners, those incomprehensible part can only be regarded as “noise” (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p.144).

The introverts of good learners, on account of their personality, are not sociable and talkative, but seem not to be influenced by the learning environment in China. Input cannot only be obtained through oral communicative interaction, it can also be obtained from reading (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p.142). Introverts are usually quiet, preferring to get input from reading. And the intrinsic characteristic of reading, like allowing readers to read repeatedly and absorb what’ve been read, helps introverts to intake what they’ve read from books or journals. This intake from reading can be source of oral communication.

Also as introverts are quiet and shy and afraid of making mistakes in front of others, they probably adopt methods that are appropriate for them to improve their English, like speaking to themselves. Therefore, in foreign language learning settings introverts may have their own way to get enough input, accordingly intake, and output. On the other hand, Extroverts, due to their personality, are talkative, tend to speak long, but this can’t guarantee the quality of their speaking, it might lead to speaking inaccurately and speaking with limited number of vocabulary and sentence pattern. In this study, the test of oral English test not only involves the length and coherence, but also involves language accuracy, width and language flexibility and appropriacy. These might be part of the reason that contributes to study result.

C. Learners’ English Learning Motivation

Out of different reasons people study a foreign language. Some students learn English because it’s an compulsory course, or they want to go to college, or to get a college diploma (Lots of colleges in China stipulate that students need to pass Band 4 College English Test to get diploma), while others study English because of their special liking for or interest at the language or its culture and people. In a word, people are motivated to learn English, though differently. Motivation has long been recognized as playing a very important role in language learning (Dewaele & Furnham 1999, p.525). The various language learning motivations are generally classified into two types: instrumental motivation and integration motivation.

The subjects chosen for the present study are all students majoring in English. They have both integrative and instrumental motivation. As for integrative motivation, they are interested in English language and are highly motivated to speak fluent, accurate and appropriate English, thus, they can communicate with native English speakers to get to know them and understand more of their culture. While in terms of instrumental motivation, they are English majors, they are supposed to graduate to pursue a career which involves using English. Intrinsic motivation, which is usually thought to be a strong impetus to successful language learning, together with instrumental motivation, help students majoring in English to strive for success in the English learning. In spite of the shortcomings of their personality, as people claim it to be, introverts with strong motivation to learn English well can go to great efforts to learn it well.

D. Cultural Influence

It's universally acknowledged that culture is associated with language. Also, culture has great influence on how people learn languages (Oxford, 1996). Culture influences people unconsciously and consciously, such as people's beliefs, perceptions, values and lifestyles, they all are manifestation of cultural influence. The less conscious cultural aspects like beliefs, perception and values plays a very important role in affecting how people learn languages, say, learning styles and learning strategies. No wonder "language learning is fully situated within a given cultural context" (Oxford, 1996)

Five thousand years of Chinese civilization has made great effect on ideology of Chinese people. Chinese people are accustomed to expressing or accepting an idea in an implicit way. Generally speaking, Chinese are inclined to be introverted, reserved and conservative, which does not allow people to express their ideas explicitly and publicly, especially when their opinions are different from others. Under this influence, Chinese students are encouraged to remain quiet and listen to the teachers attentively, which is also thought to be respectful to the teachers. In addition to that, under the pressure of National College Entrance Exam, the majority of English teachers in junior and senior high schools adopt grammar-translation teaching method, focusing on doing numerous papers preparing for coming exams. Thus, extroverts, in spite of the personality traits of being talkative and sociable, tend to be quiet in class in order to get high score and please their teachers. As a result, their personality advantage is not made good use of in classrooms, so in a way extroverts don't benefit more than introverts from classroom in terms of oral communication. When the survey is conducted, the subjects have only been in college for half an year, so even though their college English teachers have adopted communicative approach in their class teaching, trying to encourage students to speak as much as possible, it seems extroverts still do not benefit more than introverts, for students' long developed habit of keeping quiet from high schools cannot easily be got rid of.

V. CONCLUSION

The result of the study shows that learners of one personality type are not necessarily more successful at language learning than learners of the other, which is also supported by Ellis (1994). The paper has analyzed the possible factors leading to the study result from different aspects: foreign language setting, motivation, language intake and output, and culture.

As is known, in language classroom, extroverted learners are more likely to engage in oral participation than the introverts and students with quiet, reserved personalities are often treated as students with problem. Language teachers complain about students' inactivity in the classroom and endeavor to seek ways to change it and encourage extroversion. However, "high levels of classroom participation may not enhance language learning" (Ellis, 1994). Oral participation in the classroom can be encouraged but should never be driven too hard, if taking students' personality into consideration.

As the result of the study shows that personality types is not a decisive factor for the success of oral English learning, it can be suggested that students with different personality types may employ different kinds of strategies for learning, for "... personality traits make a difference in how people learn and what they learn" (Moody, 1988, p.389). Extroversion may be a factor facilitating learners to have more practice and input from oral communication. Nevertheless, there are varieties of ways that students can resort to to help improving oral English proficiency. Therefore, it's important for teachers to become aware that "some strategies may be more suited to some learners than to others" (Green & Oxford, 1995, p.33), though individuals would certainly differ from the overall group picture in the employment of certain individual items. In a word, the more the teacher knows about the factors, the more he can help students with their English learning. The next step for the research, which is more significant to learners of English, is to discover the specific learning strategies which appeal to the extraverts and introverts respectively, so that we can help a broader range of language learners.

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