

## Formal Approaches to Romance Microvariation

### Convenors:

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The workshop aims at bringing together scholars interested in the formal analysis of Romance 'dialects' (i.e. unofficial local varieties, minority languages, and historical vernaculars).

We welcome proposals that, on the basis of microcomparative evidence, address theoretical issues in Romance phonology, morphology, and syntax from either a synchronic or diachronic point of view.

In highlighting the role of theory-oriented research, we are not denying that the study of Romance languages has been benefited greatly from descriptive works, but, as far as current linguistic research is concerned, it is fair to say that empirical findings often result from research questions that, in turn, originate from theoretical assumptions. This is why we would like to bring together scholars addressing both theoretical issues and novel empirical puzzles by looking at unofficial, less studied varieties.

In some cases, the varieties under scrutiny are endangered languages that call to be analysed before they disappear under the pressure of official languages. It is worth noting that small communities in relatively isolated localities often exhibit puzzling phenomena that, once discovered, end up challenging our view on the history of Romance or our hypotheses on the 'parametric' organization of grammatical systems.

For these reasons, Romance dialects are a privileged test bed for theoretical hypotheses concerning the architecture of the faculty of language and the nature of linguistic variation. By observing genetically related languages with minimally different grammars, the researcher can focus on a single property *ceteris paribus* or examine a pattern of co-variation with the intent of isolating single parameters of linguistic variation. In Kayne's words: "the technique of examining a large number of very closely related languages promises to provide a broad understanding of parameters at their finest-grained (microparameters), that is, to provide a handle on the question, What are the minimal units of syntactic variation?" (Kayne 1996: xiii). Although it is a matter of fact that current microcomparative studies deal mainly with syntactic phenomena, it is worth recalling that our workshop is not restricted to syntactic phenomena since, as previously mentioned, we intend to build a forum for researchers with an expertise in different fields of linguistics.

Furthermore, while certain linguistic areas have been studied in depth, others are still awaiting to be thoroughly investigated, e.g. Romanian or French dialects. In some cases, the absence of a vivid research tradition is not due to the absence of documentation. French patois, for instance, have been documented by grammars and atlases since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, scholars working on certain areas (e.g. Gallo-Romance) are outnumbered by colleagues working on others and several areas of Romance-speaking Europe are still awaiting to be systematically examined.

With this intent, many research programmes have been launched in the recent past in order to provide scholars with grammatical atlases and corpora of Romance vernaculars, e.g. the *Syntactic Atlas of Italy* (ASIt), the *Syntax-oriented Corpus of Portuguese Dialects* (CORDIAL-SIN), the *Syntactic Atlas of Spanish* (ASinEs), etc. These new resources, combined with a long-lasting tradition of dialectological studies focusing on phonological and lexical aspects, are providing a wealth of data, which deserve to be compared and analysed.

Given the regional or national breadth of dialectological studies, however, no international forum has been set up yet. This workshop aims to fill this gap by bringing together Romance linguists working on dialect variation within the same theoretical framework in order to build a new international research network. In particular, the workshop aims to bring together young talented scholars, each representing a linguistic area (e.g. Romanian, Rhaeto-romance, Catalan, Italo-Romance, etc.).