

Case systems of the Alto-Adige region

The region of Trentino-Alto Adige and South Tyrol in Italy is a multilingual border region where Tyrolean dialects and two Germanic minority languages, Cimbrian and Mòcheno, are spoken alongside Romance varieties, like Venetian and Ladin. Description and analysis of the macro- and micro-variation in such a multilingual environment provides valuable insights into the processes of multilingualism and language contact. The case systems in the region show interesting micro-variation stemming from language contact and/or internal processes. For example, the Mòcheno language has prepositional dative case marking, which is absent from other varieties in the region, and all varieties have distinct case syncretism pattern.

Data is being collected through VinKo (Varieties in Contact), a digital platform for the collection of oral data through crowd-sourcing. VinKo records oral responses, rather than written ones, allowing for the collection of more spontaneous data and solving many of the problems of using primarily oral languages in a digital environment. Collaboration with local communities and active engagement of speakers with the data plays a crucial role in the larger aim of the project. Minority languages and dialect varieties are experiencing increasing pressure from standard languages, and speaker numbers are dwindling. The digital nature of the data collection encourages collaboration between speakers of different generations, as young and old speakers can bring their own specialized knowledge of language and new technology together.

This talk discusses the use of digital crowd-sourcing as an innovative way of collecting oral data and recording micro-variation in Germanic minority languages. It also highlights how this is used to gather theoretical data in a comparative cross-linguistic fashion, and the type of patterns this kind of research reveals.