

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Historical Urban Vernaculars and Supralocalisation Processes in Renaissance Italy

Josh Brown (*Australian National University*)

Research into historical urban vernaculars and supralocalisation processes has seen a resurgence of interest in recent years. Traditional accounts of language history have often traced the formation of contemporary standards in a teleological vein. This approach has left entire periods of language history ignored, including processes of supralocalisation. Linguists have only recently begun to investigate urban vernaculars and their historical evolutions for particular language families. While some attention has been paid to the history of English (e.g. Auer 2018) and French (Grübl 2014; Ayres-Bennett 2004), scholars have only recently begun to investigate these phenomena in the history of Italian (Tomasin 2016). Italian developed largely as a written language, based on the literary works of the ‘three crowns’ of Florence (Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch). The development of urban vernaculars in places outside of Florence allows us to shed new light on the complex processes involved in the development of written forms evolving parallel to the literary standard. More precisely, the regional urban varieties of Milan and Venice have long records of non-literary writing and were important regional centres from 1300-1700 (Tomasin 2013; Ferguson 2007). Given these traditions, it is possible to investigate and compare various text types from different urban centres.

This talk will briefly describe some of the issues involved in tracing urban vernaculars and processes of supralocalisation in these areas, and present new findings on the diffusion of linguistic features by paying attention to both external and internal factors of change. Specifically, I look at (a) merchant writing; (b) chancery writing, and (c) religious writing, and how these genres present different distributions for particular forms of verb morphology and orthographic variation in the history of Italian. A systematic investigation of different text types, geographical areas, and a comparison of these different factors, allow us to gain a better understanding of the processes behind the evolution of varieties which did not standardize specifically, and of the history of Italian in general.

References

- Auer, Anita. 2018. Urban literacies and processes of supralocalisation: a historical sociolinguistic perspective. In Natalie Braber and Sandra Jansen (eds.), *Sociolinguistics in England*, 13-34. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ayres-Bennett, Wendy 2004. *Sociolinguistic Variation in Seventeenth-Century France: methodology and case studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferguson, Ronnie 2007. *A Linguistic History of Venice*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki.
- Grübl, Klaus 2014. *Varietätenkontakt und Standardisierung im mittelalterlichen Französisch: Theorie, Forschungsgeschichte und Untersuchung eines Urkundenkorpus aus Beauvais (1241-1455)*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Tomasin, Lorenzo. 2013. "Quindici testi veneziani 1300-1310". *Lingua e stile*, 48, 3-48.
- Tomasin, Lorenzo. 2016. Urban multilingualism. The languages of non-Venetians in Venice during the Middle Ages. In Maria Selig and Susanne Ehrich (eds.), *Mittelalterliche Stadtsprachen*, 61-73. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner.