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# TESTING LINGUISTIC THEORY AND VARIATION TO THEIR LIMITS. THE CASE OF ITALO-ROMANCE

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Drawing on a number of corpus studies, including a considerable amount of data taken from my own corpora of textual and fieldwork studies on the dialects of Italy, I shall explore, in a manner which is accessible to both general scholars of Italian and to linguists, how the richly documented diachronic and areal variation exhibited by the Romance languages, and in particular the dialects of Italy, offers an unparalleled wealth of linguistic data. It will be shown that the linguistic varieties of Italy represent a perennially fertile and still under-utilized testing ground which has a central role to play in challenging linguistic orthodoxies and shaping and informing new ideas and perspectives about language change, structure and variation. At the same time, I will demonstrate how a familiarity with current key ideas and assumptions in theoretical linguistics has an important role to play in understanding the structures and patterns of the linguistic varieties of Italy, and, in particular, those known to us only through the texts of earlier periods where native speakers are not available to provide crucial grammaticality judgments and fill in the missing empirical pieces of the relevant puzzle.

**Adam Ledgeway**, following completion of his PhD (in Romance linguistics) at the University of Manchester in 1996 and a Research Fellowship at Downing College (1996-97), became Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer in Romance Philology at the University of Cambridge, and since 2013 has been Professor of Italian and Romance Linguistics. Since October 2015 he has been Chair of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages. He regularly lectured at numerous international conferences, has held visiting professorships at the Universities of Venice and Zurich, and was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Bucharest in 2016. His research interests include the comparative history and morphosyntax of the Romance languages, Italian dialectology, Latin, Italo-Greek, syntactic theory, and linguistic change. Recent books include: *Sui dialetti italo-romanzi. Saggi in onore di Nigel B. Vincent*, Norfolk, Biddles, 2007 (co-edited with D. Bentley); *Didattica della lingua italiana: testo e contesto*, Perugia, Guerra, 2008 (co-edited with A.L. Lepschy); *Diachrony and Dialects. Grammatical Change in the Dialects of Italy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014 (with P. Benincà and N. Vincent).