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Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Comparative Italian

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### Citation

D'Alessandro, R. (2008). *Comparative Italian*. Leiden: Universiteit Leiden. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/19665>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# *Comparative Italian*

Rede uitgesproken door

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bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van  
hoogleraar in de Italiaanse Taal en Cultuur  
aan de Universiteit Leiden  
gehouden op 9 September 2008.

SIC ENIM POTIUS LOQUAMUR:  
MELIUS EST REPREHENDANT NOS GRAMMATICI,  
QUAM NON INTELLEGANT POPULI.  
[Augustinus Hipponensis, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 138:20]

Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus, zeer gewaardeerde toehoorders,

imagine you wanted to create a robot that could speak Italian. I am not talking about a robot reproducing pre-recorded messages. I am talking about a robot being able to really speak Italian. How would you go about it?

The first thing that might come to your mind is "I'd teach it the most important Italian words". This is fine, of course, but you'd probably end up with a robot saying things like "buongiorno grazie arrivederci pizza spaghetti tiramisù!" (more or less like the tourist conversation that you often hear over there). Then you would conclude that you need something else, more elaborate than a simple list of words. You would soon enough come to the conclusion that you need to teach the robot grammar. Ok then. Let us teach this robot a grammar. How do we do this? Do we feed the robot 'Teach yourself Italian' books? Do we expose the robot to endless recordings of people speaking Italian? Do we simply talk to the robot?

None of these strategies would be effective, I'm afraid. A scientist who wished to teach a robot how to speak would probably need to hardwire the robot with a 'mechanism' for learning grammar, with the basic instructions for every language and then feed it the rules of the specific grammar of the language she wanted it to speak. This is a way, maybe there are other ways. But let's now pretend the scientist does it like this, and creates a hardware which is able to 'learn' any grammar. Which specific rules would he/she teach to the robot that wanted to learn Italian?

One option could be for the scientist to follow a genetic criterion, clustering together all the Romance (or neo-Latin, if you prefer) languages. Then (s)he would pick up one specific language, say, Spanish, teach the machine the rules for that one, and derive the other languages from that, by modifying the pilot language a bit. This might sound implausible to you, but it is exactly the methodology followed by the Microsoft NLP group in Redmond, where I had the pleasure to work for a couple of years. Just so you know, at that time they considered Italian a slightly modified Spanish, and you can't imagine how nervous I was every time I heard this concept! But hey: the Microsoft people are smart, as we all know, so there must be something good in their way of reasoning! Suppose then that the robot would be able to utter correct sentences in Italian. It would still need to learn the use of Italian, the rhetoric of Italian, the intonation and the rest, but let's stop here for the moment.

The questions I wish to answer today are: is the genetic classification enough to describe and classify a language? Is it true that a language shares most of its characteristics with other languages of the same family, as the 'linguist' seems to assume? I will try to show you that, although very relevant, the genetic criterion is not sufficient to uncover the wonders of language and to find all the possible correlations between the languages of the world. With this question in mind, we will consider Italian dialects and compare them to Italian and other Romance languages and see what comes out.

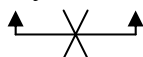
## **Romance**

If you ask my *collega proximus* Johan Rooryck how close French is to Italian, he will tell you: 'hmmm'. That will be his answer: 'hmmm'. This is because French has evolved a lot more than the other Romance languages and is structurally quite

different from them. However, Johan will also tell you, for instance, that both French and Italian have 'auxiliary selection', that French has past participle agreement almost like Italian (with some differences though) and he will add, because he is very precise, that a past participle in Romance can never agree with an external argument. What does this all mean?

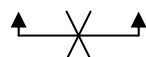
The claim: 'both French and Italian have auxiliary selection' means that, differently from English, but also from Spanish, these two languages select either HAVE or BE to form the present perfect depending on the kind of verb. For instance, if a sentence contains a verb of motion, like *arrive*, the auxiliary used to form the present perfect will most likely be BE. English is not a good language to exemplify this, but Dutch is, since Dutch presents a HAVE/BE alternation for the auxiliary in the present perfect. So, in Dutch you'll say: *ik **ben** gekomen* but *ik **heb** gewerkt*. We will return on this alternation later. For now, it is sufficient for you to remember that 'auxiliary selection' means 'selection of either HAVE or BE depending on the class of the verb'. The claim that 'the past participle never agrees with an external argument' means, very simply, that the pp will never agree with the subject of a verb that selects HAVE as its auxiliary. For instance, in a sentence with a transitive verb, the participle will not be able to agree with the subject. In other words, if you have a sentence like *Mary has killed John*, *killed* can never agree with *Mary* (1). You won't be able to see this in an English sentence like (1a), but you will see it for Italian in (1b), where you clearly see that agreement is not possible between the participle and the subject (external argument).

(1) a. Mary has killed John



*Mary/Maria*: external argument

b. \**Maria ha uccisa Giovanni*



Similarly, in a sentence like *John has worked*, *worked* can never agree with the subject *John* (not because *John* is idle, but because the auxiliary is HAVE), but in a sentence like *John has died*, *died* can agree with *John* because *John* is not an external argument (in fact, *die* takes the auxiliary BE in Italian). You can see these facts summarised in table (2).

(2)

transitives (kill, eat, ...)	intransitives with HAVE (work, sneeze)	intransitives with BE (change of state, movement verbs like grow, die)
auxiliary: HAVE	auxiliary: HAVE	auxiliary: BE
past participle agreement with the subject: NO	Past participle agreement with the subject: NO	past participle agreement with the subject: YES

In light of this classification, therefore, we can say that Romance past participles never agree with the subject of those verbs that take HAVE as their auxiliary. This is in fact one of the most famous generalisations on Romance, known as 'Belletti's generalisation', which you have on your handout and simply restates what I've just told you in more complicated words:

(3) "A crucial observation concerning the phenomenon of past participle agreement in Romance is that no variety allows the past participle to agree with the subject of intransitive/unergative and transitive verbs [...]" (Belletti 2005).

If we go back to the Microsoft style linguist who wished to build a machine that could speak Romance/Italian or Romance/Spanish, we can guess that one of the rules (s)he will teach this machine is the rule corresponding to Belletti's generalization. Observe that this rule holds only for those Romance languages that have past participle agreement and auxiliary selection. It would not work for Spanish, for instance, where these phenomena do not exist. In any case, the rules would be more or less: If you have auxiliary selection, check for the verb class and assign an auxiliary. If you have pp agreement: don't agree with the subject of the sentence if the verb takes HAVE as its auxiliary.

So far so good, and the happy linguist goes one day to Eastern Abruzzo and meets my grandmother. The dialogue that we would hear is more or less as follows: "Hi! I am an important linguist. I have created a machine that can talk. More than that. I have created a machine that can speak any Romance language". Provided that my grandmother understands what a Romance language is, she would reply "Ok, I got it. *Sci, sci, setə fittə na bbella machenə'* (lit: 'you have made a nice machine').

It would take the VIP just two seconds to understand the big mistake that (s)he has made. Two seconds, not more, since (s)he is very smart. But (s)he would be inevitably upset. Why? Because my grandma has just produced a Romance sentence that does not sound Romance at all! We will examine this sentence in details later on, and we will come back to why it is so un-Romance. For now, just believe me when I say that it is very non-Romance. There are several possible explanations for that, but what I wish to underline here is that the Italo-romance dialect that my grandmother speaks

and that almost all my guests here today speak does not follow the ‘common’ rules of Romance. Shall we really say that this dialect is not Romance? Of course not! But why is it so different from all the rest? Shall we re-define Romance? Well, probably. But to find the causes of this ‘strange’ behavior, we’ll need to look beyond Romance. But let us now abandon the scientist to her grief, bearing in mind how peculiar this dialect is, and let us make ourselves acquainted with the linguistic situation of Italy. We will hopefully return to these specific issues with another state of mind later on.

### **The dialects of Italy**

The dialect that my grandmother speaks, EA, belongs to the group of the upper southern Italian dialects. These dialects are spoken in the central and southern regions of Italy: Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia (to the exclusion of Salentino, at the very heel of Italy), upper Calabria, part of Basilicata, and Campania. You have a map on your handout in (4). To give you an idea, Neapolitans swear against the rubbish in an upper southern Italian dialect. Upper southern Italian dialects are those indicated as ‘*meridionale*’ group. Each of the areas you see on the map in different shades of grey is in turn very fragmented and that there is considerable microvariation among the dialects belonging to a same group. Italian dialects have a very peculiar status, and we will see why right away.

(4) [from Wikipedia]



In his *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante shows perfect awareness of the linguistic fragmentation on the Italian peninsula at his time, and –most important- claims the superiority of the vulgar, which is natural and spontaneous, as opposed to the artificial Latin. You have a quote in (5): "*Harum quoque duarum nobilior est vulgaris: tum quia prima fuit humano generi usitata; tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversas prolationes et vocabula sit divisa; tum quia naturalis est nobis, cum illa potius artificialis existat.* (I, i. 4)." ("Of these two kinds of languages, [vulgar and Latin] the more noble is the vernacular: first, because it was the language originally

used by the human race; second, because the whole world employs it, though with different pronunciations and using different words; and third because it is natural to us, while the other is, in contrast, artificial.")<sup>1</sup>. Vulgar is hence more noble than Latin and should be used for literature. We should remember these words indeed every time we feel tempted to stigmatise someone because his 'standard' language is not good enough.

Next, Dante tries to identify among the vernaculars spoken in Italy the one which would be the supreme vulgar, the one in which literature can be issued, and which should present the following characteristics: *illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale* ("illustrious, cardinal, aulic, and curial"). None of the existing vernaculars, Dante claims, is good enough and exhibits all the necessary features, but all the vernaculars together do: (6) "*Hoc autem vulgare quod illustre, cardinale, aulicum esse et curiale ostensum est, dicimus esse illud quod vulgare latium appellatur. Nam, sicut quoddam vulgare est invenire quod proprium est Cremonae, sic quoddam est invenire quod proprium est Lombardie; et sicut est invenire aliquod quod sit proprium Lombardie, est invenire aliquod quod sit totius sinistae Ytalie proprium; et sicut omnia hec est invenire, sic et illud quod totius Ytalie est. Et sicut illud cremonense, ac illud lombardum, et tertium semilatium dicitur, sic istud quod totius Ytalie est latinum vulgare vocatur. Hoc enim usi sunt doctores illustres qui lingua vulgari poetati sunt in Ytalia, ut Siculi, Apuli, Tusci, Romandioli, Lombardi, et utriusque Marchie viri (I,i.XIX)*" (So now we can say that this vernacular, which has been shown to be illustrious, cardinal, aulic, and curial, is the vernacular that is called Italian. For, just as one vernacular can be identified as belonging to Cremona, so can another that belongs to Lombardy; and just as one can be identified that belongs to Lombardy, so

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<sup>1</sup> Translation from the Princeton Dante Project.

can another that belongs to the whole left-hand side of Italy; and just as all these can be identified in this way, so can that which belongs to Italy as a whole. And just as the first is called Cremonese, the second Lombard, and the third half-Italian, so this last, which belongs to all Italy, is called the Italian vernacular. This is the language used by the illustrious authors who have written vernacular poetry in Italy, whether they came from Sicily, Apulia, Tuscany, Romagna, Lombardy, or either of the Marches.").

From what we hear, we can understand how insightful Dante was and how sensitive to the problem of comparison among languages.

The situation in Italy hasn't changed too much since Dante's times I'm afraid (also in other aspects, but we will limit ourselves to language this time). The delay in forming a unitary nation, together with the preceding fragmented political settlement, caused a long co-existence of literary Italian with dialects and regional varieties used for everyday communication. We do have a unitary language, the so-called Standard Italian (SI), but nobody in Italy is born as a native speaker of it. SI exists in the written language, but for the spoken language we cannot identify a region or a place in Italy where it is spoken. Traditionally, SI is identified with Florentine, or with Roman. Neither of these varieties is however SI, and if one goes to Florence or to Rome or to Milan for that matters one will immediately hear sounds that do not belong to Italian. Hence, SI is rather a concept than a reality, and people try to learn it by eliminating the more marked regional features and by following prescriptive rules. So what do Italians speak? Italians mostly speak regional varieties that are somewhere in between their dialect and Italian. The Italian linguistic situation is quite different from that of all other Romance languages, and for that reason Gaetano Berruto, an important socio-linguist, in 1987 invented the term 'bilingualism with dilalia'. In order to understand this definition, we first need to consider the status of Italian dialects.

The expression 'Italian dialects' means in fact 'dialects spoken in Italy, not 'dialects of Italian'. These so-called Italian dialects are sister languages to Italian, in that they all descend directly from Latin and have hardly interacted with Italian until very recently. They are thus not 'deteriorations' of Italian, nor do they share Italian grammar. They are in all respects autonomous grammatical systems, and Italian is just one of the Romance languages spoken in Italy. Hence, those speakers that know both Italian and one Italian dialect are in a situation very similar to bilingualism. However, as we know, bilingualism is only possible if the two languages are perfectly overlapping, and can be used in the same contexts to talk about virtually everything, from philosophy to the recipe of *tiramisù*. This is not the case with Italian dialects, since we can certainly use them to talk about the recipe of *tiramisù* but hardly ever to discuss philosophy, although I could mention some people in my village who are pretty good philosophers! When we are in the presence of a 'High variety' and of a 'Low variety' we use the term *diglossia* (Ferguson 1959), which indicates that the two varieties are not interchangeable in every context as Italian and English would be for a bilingual speaker, for instance. Now, recall that Berruto was not happy with the term 'diglossia' either when he wanted to describe the Italian situation. He preferred instead 'bilingualism with dilalia', which indicates yet a different situation, where both H and L are used in 'ordinary conversation' and, most importantly, there is a continuum of subvarieties between H and L (Posner & Green 1993).

You can now start to figure out how hard it is for a linguist to describe which variety an Italian speaks. There is a continuum of varieties between SI and the dialects, but we need to bear in mind that SI is more or less just another variety, and that 'Italian dialect' means 'dialect of Italy', not 'dialect of Italian'.

To conclude this short introduction to Italian dialects, let me remind you that 90% of the native speakers of these dialects are over 70, and that these dialects are quickly dying out under the strong superstratal influence of Italian and because of wild policies that are aimed at eliminating them. The attitude towards the local dialects is varied within the peninsula. Northern regions show more sensitivity towards the role of dialects in preserving local cultures. This is in part due to the strong anti-national and pro-independence movement which is active nowadays in these regions, but also to the strong attention dedicated to the preservation of these varieties by local governments and by linguists such as the ASIS (syntactic Atlas of Northern Italy) group or people like my highly esteemed colleague, professor Gabriele Iannaccaro, who is present here today. Southern Italy displays the reverse situation. Children at school are still told not to use their dialect, and dialects are heavily stigmatised also in all social context. Moreover, differently from northern speakers, speakers of southern dialects have a very low self perception, due to the difficult economical situation of this area. The influence of Italian added to the fact that southerners try to imitate the northern speech spoken by the majority of broadcasters, most of which come from the north, leads to the unfortunate consequence that these dialects are almost completely abandoned in the cities, and bound to disappear within the next 15 years. It goes without saying that these varieties are extremely important for the cultural heritage they represent and for the ancient knowledge they convey. I am not an anthropologist though, so let me just tell you a couple of reasons why these dialects are so important from a linguistic point of view, and why the scientist of the tale was so surprised when she heard my grandmother speak.

**Past participle agreement in Romance—a false generalisation**

Recall the sentence uttered by my grandmother and repeated in (7):

- (7)    *Setə*            *fittə*            *na*    *bbella*            *machəŋə*  
           are-2nd pl    made-pl        a-fem nice-fsg        machine-fsg  
           'You made a nice machine!'

How special is this sentence? Very special. Let's see why.

The sentence in (7) displays several morpho-syntactic characteristics that make it identifiable as Romance. First, it is *pro*-drop, which means that the subject of the sentence does not need to be phonologically expressed. The auxiliary *sete* agrees with a 2nd plural phonetically unexpressed subject. And in addition, of course, the lexicon is recognizable as Romance. But then it shows some morpho-syntactic peculiarities.

First, the past participle is marked as plural by means of metaphony, whereby the singular/plural alternation is indicated in the alternation of the stressed vowel instead of the final vowel of the word, as usually happens in Romance. For instance, as you see in example (8), the singular form of 'crazy' in EA is *mattə* and the plural form is *mittə*. In Italian and in Romance in general, the singular/plural alternation is instead expressed on the final syllable: *matto/matti*; *loco/locos*; This use of metaphony is quite common in USIDs but quite rare in other Romance varieties.

- (8)    Abruzzese:    *mattə*            *mittə*  
           Italian:        *matto*            *matti*  
           Spanish:        *loco*             *locos*  
                           crazy-sg        crazy-pl

We know then that the past participle in (7) is plural, as it contains a *i-* *fittə*. The direct object is however singular. In a sentence like (7), the rules of Italian would request a singular default form, not agreeing with the subject nor with the object, as in (9):

- (9) Avete fatto una bella macchina  
 have-2nd pl made-sg a nice machine  
 ‘You made a nice machine’

And not *avete fatti*, agreeing with the subject, or *avete fatta*, agreeing with the object. And, most important, in no case could the past participle agree with the (unexpressed) plural subject, if you recall what Belletti’s generalisation states. Recall that according to Belletti, a past participle can never agree with the subject of a transitive verb. Have a look at table (2) and you will see that pp agreement with the subject in (7) shouldn’t be possible. But it is! The past participle in (7) is plural. This means that the pp does agree with the subject. This is very interesting, I find. But this is not the end of the story. If we take a closer look at the rules governing past participle agreement in EA, we see that the picture is much more complex than just breaking a rule. Consider the sentences in (10):

- (10) a. Giuwanne a pittate nu mure  
**John-sg** has-3<sup>rd</sup> sg/pl painted-**pp sg** **a wall**  
 ‘John has painted a wall’
- b. Giuwanne a pittite ddu mure  
 John-sg has-3<sup>rd</sup> sg painted-**pp pl** **two walls**  
 ‘John has painted two walls’ [pp-OBJ agreement]



As you can see, the auxiliary varies only according to the person of the subject (from D'Alessandro & Roberts to appear). Again, sensitivity to features rather than to structure.

## (11) a. Abruzzese transitive verb

Abruzzese transitive					
1st sg <b>BE</b>	ji I	so' <b>am-1st sg</b>	fatte made-pp sg	na a-fem sg	torte cake-fem sg
2 <sup>nd</sup> sg <b>BE</b>	tu you	si <b>are-2nd sg</b>	fatte made-pp sg	na a-fem sg	torte cake-fem sg
3 <sup>rd</sup> sg <b>HAVE</b>	esse she	a <b>has-3rd sg</b>	fatte made-pp sg	na a-fem sg	torte cake-fem sg
1st pl <b>BE</b>	nu we	seme <b>are-1st pl</b>	fitte made-pp pl	na a-fem sg	torte cake-fem sg
2 <sup>nd</sup> pl <b>BE</b>	vu you-pl	sete <b>are-2nd pl</b>	fitte made-pp pl	na a-fem sg	torte cake-fem sg
3rd pl <b>HAVE</b>	jisse they	a <b>have-3rd pl</b>	fitte made-pp pl	na a-fem sg	torte cake-fem sg

b. Abruzzese intransitive verb *work*:

Abruzzese unergative			
1st sg	ji I	so' am-1st sg	fatijate worked-pp sg
2nd sg	tu you	si are-2nd sg	fatijate worked-pp sg
3rd sg	esse she	a has-3rd sg	fatijate worked-pp sg
1st pl	nu we	seme are-1st pl	fatijite worked-pp pl
2nd pl	vu you-pl	sete are-2nd pl	fatijite worked-pp pl
3rd pl	jisse they	a have-3rd pl	fatijite worked-pp pl

c. Abruzzese intransitive verb *fall*:

Abruzzese unaccusative			
1st sg	ji I	so' am-1st sg	cascate fallen-pp sg
2nd sg	tu you	si are-2nd sg	cascate fallen-pp sg
3rd sg	esse she	a has-3rd sg	cascate fallen-pp sg
1st pl	nu we	seme are-1st pl	caschite fallen-pp pl
2nd pl	vu you-pl	sete are-2nd pl	caschite fallen-pp pl
3rd pl	jisse they	a have-3rd pl	caschite fallen-pp pl

To summarize, EA presents:

1. past participle agreement with the plural argument – number feature sensitivity
2. auxiliary selection according to person – person feature sensitivity

Going back to the description of the data, I now wish to draw your attention on another interesting fact: the phenomena we just described for EA are also found in languages that are genetically totally unrelated to Italian and Italo-romance varieties, to Romance the so-called split-ergative languages.

Let us quickly clarify what 'ergative' means. Some languages, like Latin, mark morphologically the subject with Nominative case and the direct object with Accusative case in sentences that contain a transitive verb. If the verb is intransitive, the subject of the verb will be marked (with some exceptions such as psychological verbs which take the dative) as Nominative. In other words, the generalisation concerning languages like Latin, or German, is that the subject takes Nominative case and the object, if it's there, takes the Accusative.



languages have much in common with ergative languages, and also with other types of languages. In the remaining time, I will briefly try to show you what I mean.

### Split ergativity in Italo-Romance

Recall that in EA the verb selects a different auxiliary depending on whether the subject is 1st/2nd or 3rd person. This pattern (1st and 2nd vs 3rd) is also found in the so-called split-ergative languages, like Dyirbal, an Australian, Pama-Nyungan language. Observe the example in (13) from Dyirbal:

- (13) a.  $\eta$ ana            banaga-n<sup>y</sup>u  
       1pl-Nom        return-Nfut  
       ‘We returned.’  
       b.  $\eta$ uma            banaga-n<sup>y</sup>u  
       father.ABS    return-Nfut  
       ‘Father returned.’

[from Dixon 1994:14]

In Dyirbal, a different case system altogether is used if the subject is 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person. 3rd person 'subjects' have an ergative/absolutive system, 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> have a Nominative/Accusative system. This simply means that Dyirbal makes the same distinction/clustering as EA with person features. This could be a pure coincidence, of course, but we see also other features that make us suspect that EA and other central or upper-southern dialects pattern with non-Romance languages. We have just recalled that auxiliary selection varies according to the person feature of the subject. Regarding this point, van de Visser (2006), in his dissertation, reminds us that "In all instances of this type of split, the arguments appear to be ranked along a person/animacy hierarchy. Silverstein (1976) presents this hierarchy as a universal feature of natural language, and he has been the first to formulate the generalization that person split ergative languages always apply the accusative pattern to the highest

ranking arguments, whereas the ergative pattern is applied to the lowest ranking arguments." (van de Visser 2006: 19).

What is feature hierarchy? In some languages, the arguments of the verb are 'listed' according to the prominence of their features. It is normally the case that the hierarchy is made according to the person feature on nouns or pronouns, and the hierarchy is so that the higher rank is occupied by those NPs that have a higher degree of animacy or agentivity or discourse prominence (like 'I' or 'you', i.e. 1st and 2nd person items, or 'speaker' and 'addressee', which also usually correspond to 'I' and 'you'). The lower end of the scale is instead taken by inanimate objects, like 'the table', which are neither animate nor agentive in any case. Silverstein (1976) outlined the feature hierarchy in (14):

(14)

Pronouns	nouns				
1 > 2 > 3 >	proper	> common			
		> human	> animate	> inanimate	

[from van de Visser 2006:19]

According to Silverstein, the different case marking applies to the arguments that are higher in the hierarchy, and thus to 1st and 2nd pronouns, like in EA 1st and 2nd person take a different auxiliary.

To win your skepticism, let me tell you another piece of data. Very recently, in a paper by Bejar & Rezac (to appear) there was an analysis of agreement displacement phenomena, whereby usually the verb show agreement with the argument which is more prominent in the hierarchy. This is very simplified, but I hope you get the gist of it. So, not only feature hierarchy determines which case system will be attributed to

the verbal arguments, but it also determines (in languages like Basque or Georgian--split ergative languages, but also in languages like Erza Mordivian, a Uralic language, and Halkomelem, studied by Wiltschko, a Salishan language spoken in Canada, and other non-Romance languages) with which argument the verb will show agreement. The argument with which the verb will agree is the most prominent according to the feature hierarchy. We can hypothesise that, also in EA, the past participle agrees with the semantically more prominent argument, since plural is in general more marked than singular.

A hypothesis starts to come to the foreground, which is that upper southern Italian dialects present split ergativity patterns, and sensitivity to feature hierarchies. This might mean, in turn, that the structure of these varieties might differ greatly from that of Romance languages.

Of course, there are different kinds of split ergativity, and they can combine in some languages. A quite well known generalisation on split ergativity languages by DeLancey (1980) and Dixon (1994) states that 'whenever tense/aspect plays a role in split ergativity the ergative pattern is only found in past tense/perfective aspect'. That is: there is a kind of split ergativity, which is found in Hindi/Urdu, that is determined by tense and aspect. In Hindi/Urdu the ergative pattern is found in the perfective, while the Nominative/Absolute pattern is found in the imperfective. If we go back to EA, we will recall that 1st and 2nd person subjects select BE and 3rd person subjects select HAVE. Now, this only holds in the perfective past tense. The alternation disappears in the subjunctive, and in the imperfective, but suddenly reappears in the plusquamperfectum (as shown in D'Alessandro & Roberts to appear). Now, we have at least three strong indications that EA (and upper southern varieties)

follows some patterns that pertain to ergative languages like Basque, Georgian, Hindi and Dyirbal but not to Romance.

Let us draw some conclusions from what I told you today.

First, Italo-Romance dialects are extremely interesting and deserve documentation before they disappear.

Second, the genetic criterion is not enough to study and categorise languages. Hadn't we taken a closer look at the structure of these dialects, we wouldn't have seen how amazing and how un-Romance they are.

Third, EA and upper southern Italian language seem to behave along lines that are more common among ergative languages than among Romance languages. However, these dialects 'recall' those patterns, but their patterns are not exactly the same. For a start, no such thing as an ergative case is found in these dialects. I find this extremely challenging. The fact that these strange patterns appear in languages that have little to do with each other suggests that there must be a common underlying syntactic principle. Maybe we need to rethink ergativity?

Last, then, it is extremely important that linguists talk to each other. If a linguist only works on Romance, (s)he will never find out that there are languages that behave similarly outside Romance and will consider these unexpected patterns 'an exception'.

### **Final words**

In the light of what you have just heard, I must say I am very happy to be in Leiden, where I can talk to linguists of all kind, those who work primarily on the data, those who work on the theory, those who work on the history of languages, and those who work on their use. I myself had the privilege of exchanging ideas with people as

varied as Sacha Lubotsky and Lisa Cheng, as Ingrid Tieken Boon van Ostade and Johan Rooryck. I wish to tell you that it was always fruitful and inspiring, and I really hope that this new LUCL will be the ground for even greater intellectual challenges, never for fights.

I wish now to address some words to my colleagues and friends.

Hooggeleerde Rector Magnificus, waarde College van Bestuur, hooggeleerde Decaan van den Doel: ik wens U te bedanken voor de kans die U me heeft gegeven in deze academie te zijn en ik ben U dankbaar voor het vertrouwen dat U in mij heeft gesteld. Ik hoop dat vertrouwen waardig te zijn.

Highly esteemed Director of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, illustrissimo Direttore, illustri colleghi Professori Hendrix e Bossier, vorrei ringraziarvi della vostra presenza qui e ribadire il mio desiderio di collaborare con voi in tutto ciò che sarà necessario ed utile per promuovere in Olanda la nostra bella lingua. Leiden c'è.

Highly esteemed drs Ledgeway and Biberauer, dear Adam and Theresa. If I'm talking about Italian dialects today it's because of you. It's thanks to you, Adam, that I fell in love with the Italo-romance varieties and that I found out that a Brit can speak Neapolitan without an accent, and it's thanks to you, Theresa, that I learnt how every single detail needs to be taken care of, even the smallest, if you want your analysis to be a good one.

Several people have contributed to make my first year in Leiden in the middle of a reorganisatie bearable and enjoyable. Highly esteemed Professor Rooryck, dear Johan, I wish to thank so much you for all you've done to me, your support and for being there all the time.

Highly esteemed professor Lisa Cheng, dear Lisa: I wish to thank you for putting me back on track the many times when I was lost and didn't know what to do.

Highly esteemed professor Rodriguez, dear Luz: you defined yourself as ‘my Dutch mother’. I think this says it all. Muchas gracias!

Highly esteemed colleagues of the Italian department, dear Paul, Marie-José, Ellen, Anna Maria, Enrico, and Yves. We’ve gone through a lot this year. I wish to thank you wholeheartedly for your patience and for making me feel at home from the very first moment I stepped into the department, and Ellen thought I was a student. Thank you!

Dear Leiden colleagues: you have no idea how much a smile and a couple of nice words can help when the weather is grey and one has piles of documents in Dutch to decipher. Thank you for being around, even if just for a smile.

Dear students: this year we do it for real! We have made a little revolution in Italiaans and this is also thanks to you. I hope we will still cooperate, and you will still laugh at my funny Dutch and help me out with examples.

I now wish to thank my relatives, who came all the way to Holland for me. I consider myself privileged to belong to a family like ours. Grazie degli sforzi, del viaggio, e della vostra, importantissima presenza.

Then, I wish to thank my parents, who might be asleep by now since they don’t speak English: mamma e papà: non potrò mai ringraziarvi abbastanza per aver reso la mia vita bella e piena, e per tutto il vostro appoggio. Grazie.

Last, I wish to thank Marco, for all he’s meant to me in these years together, for all the discussions, for the joy, and for being there for me. Grazie, Domé.

Ik heb gezegd.

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