

# The language landscape of Italy as a linguistic data mine

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The linguistic landscape referred to in the title is not the one profiled by the “visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 23) which, in Italy as elsewhere in the world, includes, along with the official language, Italian, the languages of many migrant communities represented in publicly displayed writings. Rather, this talk will lead the audience through the Italian linguistic landscape in a different sense, taking them on a guided tour through the Romance dialects indigenous to Italy. These hundreds of mostly unwritten languages are an inexhaustible mine for the linguist, especially the language typologist. Indeed, while Italian, standardised in the 16th century on the basis of the local dialect of Florence, is part of Standard Average European (Whorf 1956), and thus suspected of being the bearer of all too familiar linguistic structures, Italian dialects (which are sister languages of Italian within the Italo-Romance branch of the linguistic family that developed from Latin) harbour a variety of linguistic structures that are unusual not only within the Romance family, but also within Indo-European. To mention but a few, *rara* and *rarissima* displayed by some Italo-Romance dialects include, for example, number and gender agreement with the clause subject occurring on nouns in the object position, or on other unusual (if not in Caucasian) agreement targets such as infinitives, adverbs or complementizers; or the occurrence of inherently possessed nouns (i.e. nouns that are bound morphemes and cannot occur without a possessive affix), as common e.g. in the languages of the Americas; or the occurrence of a construction in which a pronominal subject clitic marks progressive aspect (so far never reported for any other language of the world); or the co-occurrence of two distinct and orthogonal noun classification (i.e. gender) systems, as in some languages of Papua New Guinea and the Americas. The talk will review some of these typological riches in a way that is accessible to the uninitiated.

## References

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