

**Genetic waves and areal waves
in the Germanic-Romance language contact region in the Northeast Alps**

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In my talk, I will focus on a typology of language contact, which linguistic scholars became aware of probably first, namely areal contact. Presumably, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) was the first to observe that languages belonging to different linguistic families (German: *Stamm*), but sharing the same geographic area (*Gebiet*), often exhibit structural similarities and share parts of their lexicon – typically not their core (autochthonous) vocabulary, but rather elements of the functional lexicon. Humboldt's early insight was formalized in the twentieth century by Nikolai Trubetzkoy, who in 1923 introduced the notion of *языковой союз* ('language union'), later rendering it in German as *Sprachbund* ('linguistic league') in 1930. A sprachbund explanation has been invoked for certain linguistic phenomena predominantly distributed among the languages of the Alpine region. For these phenomena, the term 'Alpine Sprachbund' has been proposed (see, for example, more recent Gaeta and Seiler 2021).

Within this research perspective, I will concentrate on northeastern Italy. In fact, this area has been characterized by successive waves of German-speaking settlers since the Middle Ages. This migration gave rise to numerous minority communities south of the Alps, some of which have survived to the present day (Cimbrians and Mòcheni in Trentino and Veneto, Tyrolean-Carinthian Germans in Friaul). The intense interaction between the Germanic and Romance populations in this region has led to linguistic contacts that have modified not only the structure of the German minority varieties, but also the syntax of the Romance dialects of Trentino, Veneto and Friaul which exhibit specific syntactic features that distinguish them from those of central and southern Italy.

The aim of my presentation is to show how we can reconstruct the impact of the German immigration in northeastern Italy by capturing the linguistic signal left by the German-speaking population in the Romance languages in this area. To achieve this, I will present data taken from the project AlpiLinK <<https://alpilink.it>> which highlight the syntactic variation of the Italian dialects of northeastern Italy. Interestingly, the variation in the Romance dialects of this region appears to follow a linguistically structured scale of variance: the dialects with the most German-like features are found in the northernmost parts of the area, with a gradual decrease in intensity towards the south. Nevertheless, this decrease in German-like features is not merely quantitative. It follows, in fact, hierarchical patterns that reveal the internal structure of the linguistic parameters involved.

How can we measure the linguistic contact signal left by the interaction between the Germanic and Romance populations? On the one hand, we can draw on the concept of linguistic parameters as universally fixed values of core syntactic binary options, such as \pm OV (object–verb order) or \pm V2 (verb-second). This allows us to determine to what extent a given variety deviates from the core options of its language family. On the other hand, we rely on the concepts of the *g_index* and gradient lines, developed by Lazzizzera (2023), which provide a means of representing the intensity and geographic diffusion of deviant features across the region.