

**Acquiring a minority language in a trilingual society:
the influence of German and Italian on a Rhaeto-romance variety**

Jan Casalicchio (Utrecht University)

In this presentation I discuss the preliminary results of a study on the acquisition of the subject system in the Gardena/Gröden valley, where a Rhaeto-romance variety, Ladin, is spoken together with German and Italian. This study is based on novel experimental data collected in spring 2018 and stemming from 135 children between age 6 and 11. It has been carried out within a project financed by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and located at the University of Konstanz (April-September 2018).

In 2007, 49% of the Gardenesse children were reported to have acquired Gardenesse before age 3 (mostly within the family). This percentage has been dropping for the last 20 years at least, while the number of children having a German variety as L1 (alone or with another L1) is increasing. This is often due to the deliberate choice of several parents that have Ladin as L1 but decide to talk German to their children – the children would acquire Ladin anyway, thanks to the Ladin-speaking environment.

The main research question of my project was thus to investigate if it is possible to acquire a native-like level of Ladin even if it is not acquired in the family. To do so, I chose to test the use of null subjects and subject clitic pronouns: since Gardenesse is a partial pro-drop language, this part of the grammar is expected to be particularly difficult because it is different from both the Italian and the German system (more precisely, it overlaps partly with German and partly with Italian). In addition, it is a phenomenon that involves the interface between discourse and syntax.

In this presentation I discuss preliminary results that are already pointing to the fact that there are indeed important differences between children that acquired Gardenesse at home and those that acquired it after age 3; moreover, this study also allows to draw more general conclusion about when and how the syntax of subjects is acquired in Gardenesse, a matter that is particularly important because for Ladin there are no previous studies on it. This study can lead to more general analyses about the amount of input that is necessary to reach a target-like acquisition of a minority language.