

**Salentinian sociolinguistics through cladistics: the geolinguistic and social complexity of a (micro)diasystem.**

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In this study, we'll handle the structural complexity of a (micro)diasystem and phenomena hinting at geolinguistic diffusion in social settings.

We'll use cladistics in an attempt to classify Italo-Romance dialects according to phylogenetic systematicity, a method which appeared around 1950, pioneered by the first studies of the German entomologist W. Hennig. We'll apply cladistic analysis to first hand data collected on a small peripheral dialect area in southern Italy, i.e. Southern Salento – the tip of the peninsular heel. First, we'll identify phonological variables for Southern Salentinian according to diachronic criteria, in order to proceed to cladistic analysis. The results will be presented as an unrooted cladogram, providing insights on sociolinguistic patterns and social networks, though several generations of speakers, from different professional backgrounds. This fine-grained application of cladistics turns out to open a quantitative taxonomic prospect, as compared to conventional approaches of social networks and phonological clues relevant to sociolinguistic stratification and idiolectal clustering.

The starting point of our study was a questionnaire worked out according to the conventional criteria of Southern Italo-Romance dialectology and sociolinguistics, taking into account the most relevant phonological variables for southern Salentinian dialects. The survey was undertaken by the same author, a native Southern Salentinian dialect speaker, with the collaboration of town councils –whom we thank for their kindly help. The Southern Salento social background is characterized by a network of small “village-towns” of about 12 000 inhabitants each, densely populated. The main urban center, Lecce, is located far enough to have any substantial influence on the southernmost dialects we survey here. Cavallino will stand as the reference norm for Lecce, as compared to our network of five village-towns.

Cladistics rather aims at pointing out the degree of relationships or the structural convergence between several languages or varieties. In the case of the Southern Salentinian microarea, cladistics allows to analyse the granularity of a tiny sociolectal network by crossing different sociolinguistic factors. This allows to explain the typological divergence of linguistic contemporary panorama, interpretable through the ramification and the internal structure of each branch. Nevertheless, our survey is still experimental and should not be considered as definitive. Though, results are quite encouraging. We'll complete this first attempt with more conspicuous databases, and second-hand data, especially from the sociophonetics standpoint. Nevertheless, our preliminary study does provide insights into the benefits one can expect from cladistics, and will be extended to other dialectological and typological surveys of phonological variation in linguistic families or dialect networks, at different scales.

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