

**Monica Genesin, Karl Gerhard Hempel, Thede Kahl (eds.),
Endangered Language Varieties in Italy and the Balkans,
Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2024, 379 p.**

Book Review

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The topic of endangered languages has been drawing increasingly more attention over the recent years. Many a conference has been conducted, and many a book on the issue has been and will be written. Both general issues (Nau et al., 2014; Olko & Sallabank, 2021) and particular cases have been covered (Aminian Jazi & Kahl, 2024; Grond & Akin, 2024; Sorescu-Marinković et al., 2025). Maybe it is because most researchers live and work in Europe that the Old Continent has become the center of their attention.

Endangered Language Varieties in Italy and the Balkans is a collection of articles on endangered linguistic varieties in the two regions. The book gives an outlook on selected minority languages and dialects used in Italy and South-East Europe. It also includes articles on language policy legislation in different countries and on terminology in sociolinguistics.

The book was published as proceedings from the conference ‘Preserving European linguistic diversity. Endangered varieties and minority languages in Italy and the Balkans. Sustainability and language policy’ held on March 8, 2018, in Villa Vigoni, the German-Italian Center for European Dialogue. Unlike many other collections of articles, this book considers two European regions rather than one and provides an invaluable contribution to research on their relations.

The introductory article is followed by the Consensus on the Protection and Preservation of

Minority and Regional Languages, which the editors wrote. This document underlines the importance of multilingual communities and their advantages and lists some concrete key measures of language policy that contribute to the protection of endangered languages. The latter highlights the book among similar article collections.

The main part starts with a chapter on minority language policy. The first article by Dejan Matić addresses the theoretical issue of defining language death. It tries to and succeeds in disambiguating the terminology confusion for three closely related terms: *language death*, *language shift*, and *language attrition*. The following two articles, written by Lucija Šimičić and the late Fiorenzo Toso, discuss language policies of Croatia and Italy, respectively. Both indicate similar flaws in the bureaucratic systems of the two countries, such as a lack of attention to smaller linguistic varieties and the frequent non-differentiation between the concepts of linguistic minority and national minority. For instance, Šimičić brings up the case of the Arbanasi community in Zadar. Its members do not consider themselves Albanians, even though the variety they speak is based on the Gheg dialect of the Albanian language. For his part, Toso points out that the confusion between the terms *linguistic minority* and *national minority* leads to certain problems, such as a closed number of recognized minorities.

The following chapter contains three articles on linguistic landscapes. Both Karl Gerhard Hempel and Aleksandra Salamurović highlight the issue of the visibility of languages in multilingual (rather than bilingual) areas. Hempel discusses the use of Italian, German, and Ladino in South Tyrol, presenting interesting examples of a creative approach to language use on bilingual street signs (both top-down and bottom-up). This approach takes into account different syntactic features of Italian and German. Salamurović explores the use of Serbian, Hungarian, and German in the marketplaces of Novi Sad from 1748 to 1945, comparing the situation to the present day. Additionally, she examines the use of Cyrillic and Latin script for Serbian during these periods. The article is a rare (and valuable) example of writing about linguistic landscapes from a diachronic perspective. Monica Genesin and Joachim Matzinger discuss the use of Italian and Arbresh (an Albanian-based variety) in San Marzano di Giuseppe, a village in Apulia (Southern Italy). The authors provide examples of the use of standard Albanian in linguistic landscapes and compile the first list of toponyms and related terminology in Arbresh, a variety lacking a written tradition.

The book's third chapter is dedicated to the vitality of minority languages in Italy. Maria Luisa Pignoli and Emilia Conforti address the case of Arbëresh. Conforti is moderately optimistic about teaching minority languages in primary schools, particularly in Calabria and Sicily. Conversely, Pignoli holds a pessimistic view regarding the vitality of the varieties spoken in Northern Arbëria (the regions of Abruzzo, Apulia, Campania, and Molise), pointing out deficiencies in the implementation of Italian Law 482/1999 on the Protection of Endangered Languages. These deficiencies include a lack of coordination among the governments of the four regions where the varieties are spoken, and issues with the so-called Language Desks. Franco Finco offers a positive example of the law's implementation. His overview of the legislative protection measures for

Friulian, a Romance language spoken in North-Eastern Italy, is followed by a look at the media, music, and literature in that language, including literary works by the film director Pier Paolo Pasolini.

The book's last chapter opens with two articles that answer a sophisticated question: What can linguists do if a variety faces extinction or is already extinct? Francesco G. Giannachi provides his collected material on toponymy in the municipality of Soleto in Apulia. The list of toponyms includes place names of both Greek and Italian origin, some of which are no longer used. Luana Rizzo investigates the use of Greek in Salento (Apulia) from the 11th to the 16th century. Additionally, she highlights several projects aimed at recovering the region's linguistic and cultural heritage, including digitizing old manuscripts and publishing previously unpublished codes. The next articles discuss innovations in minority languages induced by total language contact. Among other phenomena, Malinka Pila examines the imperfect tense use in counterfactual conditionals in Resian, a Slavic variety spoken in North-Eastern Italy. The variety's historic isolation from other Slavic languages has contributed to the development of the verbal system according to the Romance model, where the aorist disappears before the imperfect. Walter Breu addresses a similar yet distinct phenomenon in Molise Slavic. Furthermore, he discusses various periphrastic verbal constructions in both Molise Slavic and Molise Albanian that have developed as calques from Italian. Christoph Giesel provides an overview of innovations in the language of Sandžak-Bosniaks in Istanbul. These innovations arise from contact with Turkish and can be found at all levels, including phonetic, morphological, syntactical, and lexical. The final article, written by Livio Gaeta, introduces the ArchiWals Archive. This unique project includes a lexicon and a corpus of five varieties of the Walser (German-based) linguistic islands in North-Western Italy. The sources for the corpus

comprise data from the first half of the 19th century to the present. Gaeta argues that the archive can help diminish the effect of the observer's paradox. Unfortunately, the archive's website seems to be currently unavailable.

It is hard not to appreciate the editors' attitude toward their work. To be sure, there are some minor weaknesses in the book. For instance, the editors provide information about its structure in the introductory article. However, this information cannot be seen in the table of contents. From my point of view, it would be logical to switch the second and third chapters so that Toso's article about the Italian law on the protection of endangered languages is followed by articles by Pignoli, Conforti, and Finco regarding the law's implementation. Additionally, it is frustrating that it took six years to publish the conference proceedings. Still, the book decently contributes to the research on endangered languages in Italy and the Balkans. It provides a valuable and absorbing window into the study of the often-neglected minority languages.

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