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## **ValCon - Value in Contact: measuring how language contact and priming regulate language change**

All languages change at variable rates through time. Several language internal and external factors have been considered as underlying mechanisms for such change. Language internal factors have been successful in modelling chains of changes within the system, but their relevance as initial triggers remain controversial. In this respect, language external factors are frequently invoked, among which language contact holds a prominent role. Languages are not in contact per se, however, people are: languages are in contact because people acquiring them as grammatical systems store them both in their brain and use them both alternatively. The question is what drives potential interferences between the systems (crosslinguistic influence) and if it can trigger diachronic change.

This project proposes a new, replicable methodology for testing hypotheses on the mechanisms underlying diachronic change and verifies it by testing the hypothesis that such mechanism corresponds to priming, intended as the facilitative effects of an encounter with a stimulus on subsequent processing of the same or a related stimulus. Priming has been shown to be active both within and, crucially for our objectives, across languages (multilingual & L2 populations): in multilingual settings, the frequent activation of a linguistic structure of Grammar A could lead to produce said structure in the system of Grammar B, sparking the process of language change. I test this hypothesis by exploiting the fact that different phenomena show consistently different rates of change and checking if there is a significant correlation between such rate of change and the strength of priming affecting a given phenomenon. The Italian area, where a wide range of well-studied varieties coexist with Italian as a majority language in a comparable sociolinguistic environment, offers the perfect testing ground for this methodology, paving the way for the psycholinguistic study of crosslinguistic microvariation.

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