When Three Become Two: The development of Greek and Romance Complementizer Systems in the Dialects of the Extreme South of Italy

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This talk highlights the historical role of language contact, in this case Greek on Romance, in shaping the form and distribution of the complementizer systems (and their associated effects on the sentential core) found in the dialects of the extreme south of Italy. Alongside a now well-studied and widely-investigated core binary split between realis and irrealis complementation in the Romance dialects of Calabria and Salento which faithfully reproduces, though not in lexical form, the corresponding structure and distribution of the binary complementizer system of Italo-Greek, both Calabrese and Salentino also provide evidence, in some cases today only partially reconstructable, of the use of a third complementizer, the so-called factive complementizer typical of numerous diachronic and diatopic varieties of Greek (Nicholas 1998). The talk will focus on the status of this third complementizer, which variously functions as a relativizer, a factive complementizer proper and a marker of optative illocutionary force, to show that the ternary complementizer is today in large part recessive both in Italo-Greek and in Calabrese and Salentino. An investigation of the relevant facts will demonstrate how today the original ternary C-system has predominantly been reduced to a binary system, the formal exponents of which may vary in diatopy in accordance with different patterns of distributional overlap between the original realis and factive complementizers. Finally, the talk will also examine the formal organization and relationships of the modal distinctions in the Greek and Romance C-systems of the extreme south of Italy to reveal how of the three complementizers the realis complementizer is arguably the least marked, since not only does it subsume factivity optionally substituting all the possible functions of the so-called factive complementizer, but it may even substitute, especially in specific structural contexts, the irrealis complementizer in its core functions.