



# Honorificity is Deictic But It isn't: The Case of Italian *voi* and *lei*

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**Date:** March 5, 2024 (Tuesday)  
**Time:** 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)  
**Venue:** Room 306, Lee Shau Kee Building,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



## Abstract

This talk will examine honorificity in Romance by considering the need for a feature HON. Italian features two main honorary pronouns: *lei* and *voi*: by examining their agreement patterns and syntactic behavior, it will be shown that their rather complex (and non-homogeneous) agreement patterns result from the interaction of an HON feature with other phi-features. It will be shown that HON is related to gender, and that it is not a purely deictic feature. Finally, by examining ongoing changes in the use of honorific pronouns, conclusions will be drawn regarding the directionality of language change and the relevance of phase edges as loci where narrow syntax “communicates” with its interface systems. Honorificity will be shown to be similar to prosody in targeting phase edges and being external to the core pronominal (or verbal, in the case of prosody) structure.

## Speaker

Roberta D'Alessandro is Chair Professor of Linguistics/Syntax and Language Variation and Head of the Linguistics section at Utrecht University in The Netherlands. After earning her PhD from the University of Stuttgart in Germany, she worked as a research associate at Microsoft-Butler Hill in Redmond, Seattle, US, and as a Marie-Curie Postdoctoral fellow at the University of Cambridge. Later, she was as research associate at the Di Sciullo Interface Lab at UQAM in Montreal, Canada. Between 2007 and 2016, she held the position of Chair Professor of Italian Language and Culture at Leiden University, The Netherlands. She is editor-in-chief of the journal *Isogloss* and co-editor of the *Open Generative Syntax* series at Language Science Press. Additionally, she serves as editor-in-chief of the Brill series *Grammars and Sketches of the World's languages – Romance*. She is the president of *Going Romance*, the largest conference of generative grammar of the Romance languages in Europe. D'Alessandro has published extensively on syntax, syntactic agreement, heritage languages, impersonals, and syntax-phonology interface, and recently completed a large European project on heritage language syntax. She is also an European Commission advisor on the *Knowledge for policy – Meaningful and Ethical Communication* program. Her latest book, *Heritage Languages and Syntactic Theory*, edited with Michael Putnam and Silvia Terenghi, is set to be published this summer by Oxford University Press.

All Are Welcome

Enquiries

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