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#### SUMMARY

This paper deals with the multiple developments of the lateral geminate consonant in the dialects of Southern Italy. After considering the broader Romance area affected by changes of this phonetic segment, it focuses on the structural properties of the variants, their distribution across word classes and their diatopic diffusion in the upper regions of Southern Italy and especially in Campania. The latter area is particularly interesting in that in a relatively small space it presents most of the forms that are scattered around the whole South and Sicily. The comparison of the evolutions of the lateral consonant in the Romance dialects to those in the dialects of Greek seems to offer a parallel that helps to understand paths of change. The loss and preservation of consonantal quantity emerge as two fundamental factors that may have been responsible for the diverging paths of the variants (notably, the rhotacized variants as opposed to the cacuminal (retroflex), dental, approximant, palatalized variants).

The two main explanations of the origin of the Romance polymorphism of the lateral segment have been considered, i.e. Mediterranean substratum and polygenesis. It is argued in favour of the latter, drawing on recent phonetic research on the lateral segments that points to a considerable inner articulatory instability of this type of consonants. It is suggested, however, that further investigations on finer phonetic details of the variants should be carried out before establishing firmer conclusions.

The final part of the work is devoted to a closer analysis of the variants that occur in Campania and their diffusion in some coastal areas (Monte di Procida), in the island of Procida and in the internal mountainous district of Irpinia (Valle del Calore). It is argued that the divergences in preservation of the variants may be correlated to the different types of linguistic community.