What we call the Italian language today—the Italian of newspapers and television, of Italian language tuition, of street signs, of the Italian parliament—is only one variant among many languages spoken within the Italian peninsula throughout its history. Local dialects and regional variants of Italian continue to have a significant cultural role in literature, music and cinema. Moreover, because of the recent increase in immigration, there is now a significant number of speakers of other languages living in Italy.

An awareness of this linguistic diversity and its uses is essential to communicate effectively. This course is intended to introduce students to the linguistic history of Italy and the key socio-linguistic notions that account for language use today. As such, the course is an ideal complement to the study of Italian as second language.

The rich linguistic map of Italy is not an exceptional case, and the same interplay between one standard literary language and several non-standard dialects is found in many other countries around the world, including, to an extent, English-speaking countries. In this course students will be encouraged to provide examples from their linguistic background, and to become aware of the socio-linguistic norms of their own community.