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THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 11.11.2021
16:15-17:45
Ziv Plotnik, Tel Aviv University

The Relevance of Unaccusativity to Possessive Datives

Following Borer & Grodzinsky (1986), it has been commonly assumed that the Hebrew Possessive Dative is possible with unaccusative verbs (verbs whose subject is an internal argument) but not with unergatives (whose subject is external) ((1) vs. (2)).

(1) ha-robot nišbar le-dan
the robot broke to-dan
'Dan's robot broke'

(2) *ha-robot ne'emad le-dan.
the robot stood up to-dan
intended meaning: 'Dan's robot stood up'

Gafter (2014) ran an experiment showing that the prominence, on scales of animacy and definiteness, of the dative possessor compared to the possessee determines the acceptability of the construction. His results do not support nor refute the relevance of unaccusativity, as his experiment was not designed to test it. We ran a series of experiments designed to test the relevance of unaccusativity. Specifically, we conducted a series of acceptability judgement experiments that neutralized the effects of possible confounding factors, such as animacy, definiteness, lexical choice, etc. All experiments yielded statistically significant results, with unaccusatives receiving a significantly higher acceptability rating than unergatives, including reflexives. We also tested how inalienable possession affect the possessive dative construction.

In this talk, I will report the results of this series of experiments and deal with the theoretical issues they raise.

Click [here](#) to see the colloquium program.