

**Tel-Aviv University
The School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies
Department of Linguistics**

THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

**Thursday 7.1.2021
16:15-17:45**

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A diachronic explanation for cross-linguistic variation in the use of inverse-scope constructions

This study investigates the cross-linguistic variation in the use of inverse-scope constructions such as *All that glitters is not gold* for expressing “not every x is y” propositions—and in particular, why these constructions are in use and even common in some languages but lacking in others. The language sample contains 110 languages from diverse language families and linguistic areas. Given that inverse-scope constructions are rarely described in grammars, I use translations of the New Testament as a parallel corpus in order to collect primary cross-linguistic data. For 31 of the languages, historical translations are also available.

The main finding is that the cross-linguistic variation is explained by competition with alternative scope-transparent constructions, but only when the history of individual languages is taken into consideration. When a language develops a novel construction such as *Not all that glitters is gold*, which expresses scope relations transparently, it may take several centuries before this novel construction finally pushes a pre-existing inverse-scope construction out of the grammar. In the meantime, the use of inverse scope appears to be unmotivated from a synchronic point of view.

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