

On the natural history of negative polarity items

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Some 50 years of work on polarity items has brought us many theories and classifications of polarity items. This talk will provide an overview of the various accounts and classifications found in the literature, such as the extended Zwarts hierarchy: antimorphic > anti-additive > downward entailing > nonveridical, all based on entailment properties of the contexts in which the items may appear. I will consider extensions of this model to deal with presuppositions, in particular Strawson-entailment (von Stechow 1999), and will argue that some polarity items are also sensitive to conversational implicatures. I will argue against concentric classifications such as the Zwarts hierarchy, and will argue that a proper treatment of the full range of polarity items yields a more complicated picture. Theories that allow for multiple licensing (or anti-licensing) requirements, such as those of Linebarger and Giannakidou, will be compared to “silver bullet” theories such as those of Zwarts and Von Stechow, that assume one licensing property per item.