

## On negative polarity: the licensing problem revisited

We have just celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the emergence of the two leading programs for analyzing the factors constraining the distribution of negative polarity items:

- (i) Ladusaw's downward entailment theory (1979), refined and extended by Heim (1984), Kadmon & Landman (1993), Krifka (1995), von Stechow (1999), Hoeksema (2000) and many others, on which NPI licensing is governed by monotonicity and other semantic principles expressible as progressively stricter Boolean conditions; and
- (ii) Linebarger's syntactico-pragmatic account (1980, 1987, 1991) invoking direct licensing by overt negation and indirect licensing by negative implicature, the latter reconstructed more recently as a supplementary "rescue" operation within the non-veridicality framework of Giannakidou (1998, 1999, 2006, in press) and her colleagues.

I will step back from the fray to question whether **any** strictly formal approach can do justice to the empirical domain, especially given the reliance on traditional tools (in particular, entailment) underlying mainstream approaches. One murky domain that will prove useful to illuminate is that of implicit licensing, as in contexts containing exclusives (*only*), exceptives (*every/no...but*), approximatives (*barely, almost*), yes-no questions, and sarcasm (*Like I'd ever eat any of that*). By extending the database to a range of cases in which NPIs are ill-formed despite the presence of an accessible discourse-salient but non-asserted negative proposition, I will argue that NPI licensing in languages like English depends not on what is ENTAILED or what is IMPLICATED but on what is ASSERTED, and hence on the illocutionary point of the utterance, i.e. what is at issue. I will also survey a range of cases that demonstrate the empirical inadequacy of implicature-based approaches invoking the speaker's communicative intentions.