

## On the pragmatic licensing of negation

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Negative sentences are often reported to be more difficult to comprehend than their positive counterparts. Traditional findings from sentence-picture verification tasks have often suggested that negation is more complex because it evokes another stage of operation in addition to the initial stage of processing an affirmative proposition (e.g. Carpenter and Just 1975; Clark and Chase 1972). Pragmatics-based accounts of negation comprehension, however, argue that negation is pragmatically felicitous if it is used to deny or contradict a positive proposition that is made salient or “expected” in some way (e.g. Wason, 1965), and when negation is “pragmatically licensed”, the processing complexity associated with it may disappear (Nieuwland and Kuperberg, 2008). In the current talk, we will take a more nuanced look at the nature of the pragmatic licensing effect on negation. In particular, using data from four behavioral experiments, we will argue that an informativity-based account is superior to an expectation-based account. These two notions, informativity and expectation, share some similarities, but our data suggests that contextual expectation only modulates negation comprehension cost if it facilitates the appropriate type of question under discussion, and the observed effect is better explained by a more precise notion of informativity.