NEGATION IS A PERVERSIVE FEATURE of natural language and for the most part, the linguistic and psycholinguistic literature takes it to be a categorical, binary notion: the sentence “Sue left” is positive, while the sentence “Sue didn’t leave” is negative because of the sentential negation “didn’t.”

At the same time, sentences like “Anna answered none of/few of my letters” have been taken to involve some form of negativity despite the fact that they do not contain sentential negations— but their negativity has not been explicitly quantified.

The first part of the talk presents a new test for detecting and quantifying the negativity of a sentence based on the observation that negative sentences license the particle “no” in agreeing responses, e.g., (1) below, while positive sentences do not license “no” in agreeing responses, indicated by the star in (2) below.

1. A: Anna didn’t answer my letter.
   B: No, she didn’t.

   B: *No, she did.

After providing experimental evidence that backs up this novel test, the talk discusses an experiment that uses the test to quantify the negativity of sentences like “Anna answered none of/few of my letters.” The results support the view that sentence negativity is a matter of degree and it is influenced by interacting semantic and syntactic factors.