The rich meaning of expletive negation
Denis Delfitto
(in cooperation with G. Fiorin, C. Melloni, M. Vender)

In this presentation, I will face the main issue posed by expletive negation (EN):
What is the place of EN within a theory of meaning?

The state-of-the-art on EN suggests the relevance of non-veridicality and evaluative meanings
for the licensing and interpretation of EN. Also, reference has frequently been made to some
version of multidimensional semantics, involving different layers of meaning or reified
conversational implicatures.

By considering linguistic data from different languages, focusing especially on Italian and
Romance, I will discuss the meaning contribution of EN in a variety of syntactic contexts,
including before-clauses, comparative clauses and exclamative clauses, and I will argue that in
all these contexts EN delivers the very same contribution to meaning: it negates the
implicated meaning of the sentential structure in which it is realized.

The extended use of EN in Romance (in absence of the double-negation structures found in
German) suggests a non-incremental interpretation of negation, according to which negation
dynamically interacts with the contextual determinants of implicated meaning. I will discuss
the relationship of this interpretation to negative concord and double-negation readings.

Finally, there is an interesting parallelism to be drawn with the non-incremental models of
negation in language processing, including the so-called ‘experiential’ view of negation, with a
number of important consequences for the relation of syntax to compositional meaning and
the relation of syntax to the dynamic components of contextual interpretation
(syntax/pragmatics interface).