Negativity and Semantic Change

It is often argued that natural language is biased towards negative differentiation, meaning that there is more lexical diversity in negative affectual language, compared to positive language. However, we lack an understanding of the diachronic linguistic mechanisms associated with negative differentiation. In this talk, I will review key concepts related to negative differentiation and discuss how I am using diachronic word embeddings to test whether negative lexical items are more semantically unstable than positive ones. Preliminary results suggest that rates of semantic change are faster negative affectual language, compared to positive language. I will finish my talk by discussing some practical consequences of this positive/negative asymmetry for sentiment analysis tools.