Simply not? How negation is strengthened in discourse, and which effects this may have over time
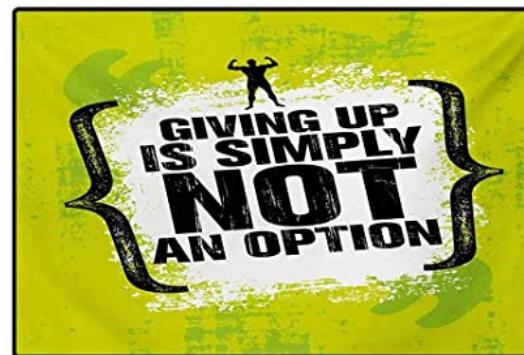
Chiara Gianollo

FICLIT - Università di Bologna

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Simply *not*?

Aim of this talk: to discuss emphatic (or "strengthened") ways to express negation, such as the use of expressions like "absolutely", "at all", "any", "even", "the least bit" in combination with negation.

- **Crosslinguistic forms** for strengthened negation
- **Discourse function** of strengthened negation
- **Diachronic effects** of negation strengthening

Part of the discussed material comes from joint work with **Caterina Mauri** (Introduction to the Workshop ***Simply not? Ways to strengthen negation***, Bologna, May 21, 2019, http://corpora.ficlit.unibo.it/SN2019/)

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Why bother? The centrality of negation

The expression of **negation** is a fundamental, universal feature of natural languages

However, the basic nature of the logical operation involved should not mask the complexity of its **expression** in the world's languages, and the broad spectrum of **semantic** and **pragmatic** interpretations involved

Just limiting ourselves to sentence negation (engl. *I did **not** eat the cake*):

EXPRESSION: verbal affix, particle, adverb, auxiliary verb, complementizer, conjunction, indefinite pronoun / adjective..."distributed" across various elements (discontinuous negation, Negative Concord)

INTERPRETATION: emphatic / strengthened, internal or external, contradictory or contrary, descriptive or metalinguistic, pleonastic, expletive...
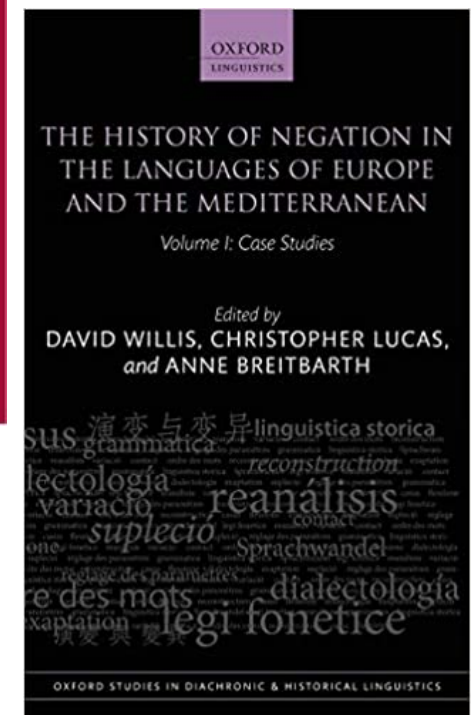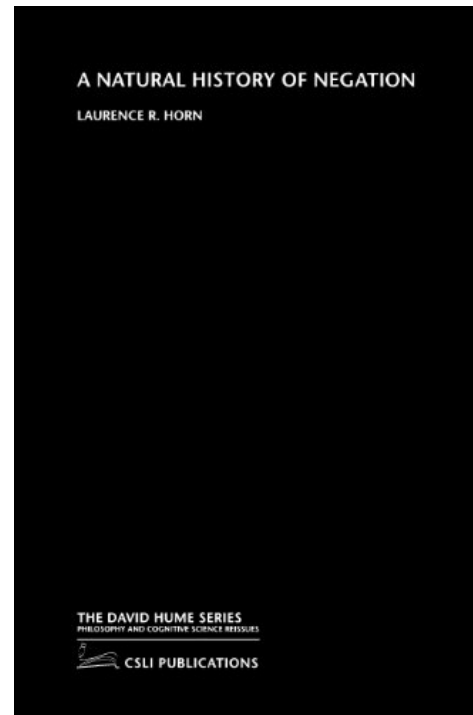
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Pillars

Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab.

Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser. **I,** 5.

NEGATION

IN

ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES

BY

OTTO JESPERSEN

KØBENHAVN

HOVEDKOMMISSIONÆR: ANDR. FRED. HØST & SØN, KGL. HOF-BOGHANDEL

BIANCO LUNOS BOGTRYKKERI

1917

A NATURAL HISTORY OF NEGATION

LAURENCE R. HORN

THE DAVID HUME SERIES
PHILOSOPHY AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE REISSUES

CSLI PUBLICATIONS

Hedde Zeijlstra

Sentential Negation
and Negative Concord

HIL   ACLC   : LOT   Netherlands
Graduate
School of
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OXFORD
LINGUISTICS

THE HISTORY OF NEGATION IN
THE LANGUAGES OF EUROPE
AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Volume I: Case Studies

Edited by
DAVID WILLIS, CHRISTOPHER LUCAS,
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OXFORD STUDIES IN DIACHRONIC & HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

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«Strengthening»

What do we mean exactly when we speak of

strengthened / emphatic / pragmatically marked / non-canonical negation?

→ These are not equivalent designations and are used to refer to a variety of linguistic behaviors and motivations: exclusion of marginal exceptions, special emotive charge, reaction to a skeptical interlocutor.....

→ Can we describe these behaviors more precisely in terms of their discourse function? (cf. attempts in Schwenter 2003, Amaral & Schwenter 2009, Larrivée 2016, Roitman (ed.) 2017)

> Which linguistic *forms and strategies* are used to express strengthened negation?

> How many *strengthened meanings* are there?

> What *motivates* them in terms of communicative needs?

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Formal strategies

Strategies: intensifying adverbs

Italian (and English): plain and emphatic negation have the same truth-functional content, however their discourse contribution (and the conditions they obey) are different

1) a. Non ho   comprato niente   *plain sentential negation*
        not have.1sg bought   nothing
        "I did not buy anything"
    b. Non ho comprato **assolutamente** niente   *strengthened negation*
        "I did not buy anything at all"

2) a. Non conosco Gianni   *plain sentential negation*
        "I don't know Gianni"
    b. Non conosco **assolutamente** Gianni   *strengthened negation*
        "I absolutely don't know Gianni"
    c. Non conosco **per niente** Gianni   *strengthened negation*
        "I don't know Gianni at all"

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Strategies: presupposition-triggering adverbs (1)

Italian:

3) a. Non ho comprato quel libro

    "I did not buy that book"

  b. Non ho **mica** comprato quel libro

  "I did not buy that book, contrary to what people say / you may think.."

In this type, the adverb is connected to more specific conditions of use (i.e., it acts as a presupposition trigger) (Cinque 1976; Penello and Pescarini 2008; Visconti 2009; Ballarè 2018).

→ *mica* is felicitous when the context provides grounds for the speaker to assume that the proposition being negated is part of the hearer's assumptions and when the speaker wants to deny the validity of this assumption

→ Presuppositional negation ("contrary to what you may think….")

Strategies: presupposition-triggering adverbs (2)

West Flemish (Breitbarth & Haegeman 2010, 2014): *polarity focus* with West Flemish *en*

From Breitbarth & Haegeman (2014: 72):

```
(5)    a.    Ge    zou     lyk  peinzen  dat   da    Valère  is.
             you   would   like think        that  that  Valère  is.
             Mo    t=en   is  Valère  niet.
             But   it=EN  is  Valère  not.
             'One would think it was Valère. But it wasn't Valère.'
             (MJL, Lapscheure, 12.8.2012, 18.00)
       b.    [doctor:]  'Kom   gie   binnen  zes  maanden  ne keer  were.'
                        come  you   in       six  months   once    back
             'Come back in six month's time.'
             M=en    een    wunder  zelfs  geen   ofsproake    gemoakt.
             we=EN   have   we      even   no     appointment  made.'
             'We haven't even made an appointment.'
             (MJL, Lapscheure, 15.05.2008)
```

The discourse context / the speaker's expectations entail the positive counterpart of the actual negative predication

Despite similar pragmatic conditions, subtle differences in distribution hold across the class of presupposition-triggering adverbs

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Strategies: indefinites

4) a. **Non** ho comprato **nessun** libro

lit. I did not buy **no** book = Negative Concord «I bought no book»

b. **Non** ho comprato **alcun** libro

«I did not buy **any** book»

→ (b) is often perceived as more emphatic by speakers

«Emphatic» nature of Negative Polarity Items

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Strategies: minimizers and generalizers

5) a. **Non** ha bevuto **una goccia**

"S/he did not drink a drop"

b. **Non** ha detto **una parola**

"S/he didn't say a word"

c. **Non** ho capito **un tubo**

"I did not understand a thing" lit. "tube, pipe"

6) **Non** ho sentito **persona** che dicesse… (cf. French *personne*)

"I did not hear anyone saying… " (lit. I did not hear a person…)

Cf. well-known role in Jespersen's Cycle:

Bolognese *brisa* 'crumb', cf. It. *mica*, Fr. *mie*

7) *Al **n'è brîsa** turnè*

he not is BRISA come.back   'He did not come back'

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Strategies: correlative negation

8) a. Non ha comprato il pane. Non ha comprato il latte

"S/he did not buy bread. S/he did not buy milk"

b. Non ha comprato il pane e/o il latte.

"S/he did not buy bread and/or milk"

c. Non ha comprato **né** il pane **né** il latte

"S/he bought neither bread nor milk"

→ Why is correlation felt stronger?

Argumentative perspective (Anscombre & Ducrot 1983): *with respect to a.,* argumentative strength in (c.) comes from the fact that the conjuncts are typically co-oriented towards the same aim in conversation

→ even if they are not informationally stronger than each individual conjunct, they feel stronger because of "shared topicality" (cf. Schwenter & Waltereit 2010)

Strategies: focus particle

Reinforcement through *even* and similar focus particles (It. *nemmeno, neanche, neppure*)

9) a. Uscendo **non** ha **neanche** salutato

   "S/he didn't even greet when s/he left"

   b. **Non** ha detto **neppure** una parola

   "S/he didn't even say a word"

Interaction with scalar focus (König 1991, Krifka 1995): with scalar focus, alternatives are ordered along a scale; the focus denotation ('greet', 'say a word') is the extreme of the scale

Stategies: focus-marked sentence constructions

Bi-clausal reduplication in Italian:

10) A: Francesca è partita

"Francesca left"

B: **No che non** è partita!

"No, she did not leave!"

(cf. positive: "Sì che è partita!") (Poletto & Zanuttini 2013)

Sentence-final *não* in Portuguese (Schwenter 2005, Martins 2013, Larrivée 2014):

11) O João **não** comprou um carro **não** (Eu.Pt., Martins 2013: 118)

"João did NOT buy a car"

Stategies: focus-marked sentence constructions

Non-standard structures from regional varieties:

(italiano regionale):

12) **Non** me   sta   bene **che no**!

    not   to.me stays well that no

"I don't like it at all!"

(italiano standard: cleft construction

No che   non mi   va   bene!

Not that not to.me goes well

Italiano colloquiale:

Non mi va bene no!)

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Meaning and discourse function

Overview: meanings

Two main levels of application of strengthening procedures:

- At the level of **quantificational domains** – widening while describing a state of affairs (DESCRIPTIVE NEGATION)

- At the level of **assertability** – fundamental interactional nature of this procedure (ARGUMENTATIVE NEGATION)

No one-to-one correspondence between strategies and meanings (cf. *assolutamente*)

Marked meanings: intensification

absolutely, at all…

highest degree on a naturally given scale of degrees (e.g. degrees of knowledge in the case of *conosco* – "know")

13) a. Non conosco **assolutamente** Gianni

"I absolutely don't know Gianni"

Chatzopoulou (2018: 184): "intensity refers to a qualitative or quantitative gap between two states relative to a phenomenon"

→ Quantification of degrees (gradability as crosscategorial dimension)

b. **Assolutamente** non conosco Gianni

"Absolutely, I don't know Gianni"

→ Intensification of illocutionary commitment! Cf. mitigation…

Parry (2013: 82) "quantifying the scale of rejection […] or the refusal of a proposition"

Marked meanings:
extension of quantificational domain

Domain widening (e.g. with NPIs): removal of contextual restrictions on quantificational domains, resulting in an extension of the interpretation of the common noun phrase (or, more generally, of the restrictor) (Kadmon & Landman 1993; Chierchia 2006, 2013 a.o)

14) a. I don't have potatoes   (possible contextual restriction: cooking potatoes)

   b. I don't have **any** potatoes (no contextual restriction)

→ reduced tolerance of exceptions

→ all members of the domain, even the most marginal ones, are an option: "even things that could previously be disregarded as irrelevant (in a given context) are no exception to the claim being made" (Kadmon & Landman 1993: 359)

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Marked meanings: negation of presupposition

Negation acting beyond the propositional level, targeting the *explicit* or *implicit* information in the common ground

Presuppositional negation (*mica* and the like) needs to be anaphoric to an assumption in context (and contrastive with respect to it)

→ *interactional* nature of this type of strengthened negation (entails a comparison among different epistemic states)

Cf. Schwenter (2003) on "de-realizing" meaning of Spanish *tampoco* and the role of asymmetries among interlocutors

Spanish in Schwenter (2003: 1027)

(33) R: >Por cierto, me han aceptado el abstract para ese congreso. Ahora me
            toca inventar algo...
            'By the way, they've accepted my abstract for that conference. Now I've
            got to invent something...'
      H: *Tampoco* creo que vaya a haber muchos expertos en el tema allí.
            'I don't think many experts on the topic will be there.'

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Marked meanings: metalinguistic negation

Metalinguistic negation: rejection of a previous utterance = denial of **assertability**, not of truth

16) European Portuguese:

A: *Estás um pouco preocupado?* (Eu.Pt., Martins 2014:638)

'Are you a little worried?'

B: *Estou **lá/agora** um pouco preocupado, estou morto de preocupação.*

'I'm not a little worried, I am worried sick.'

Cf. Italian: ***Non** sono un POCO preoccupato, sono MORTO di preoccupazione*

Cf. corrections (replacive negation, Jacobs 1991), e.g. Spanish:

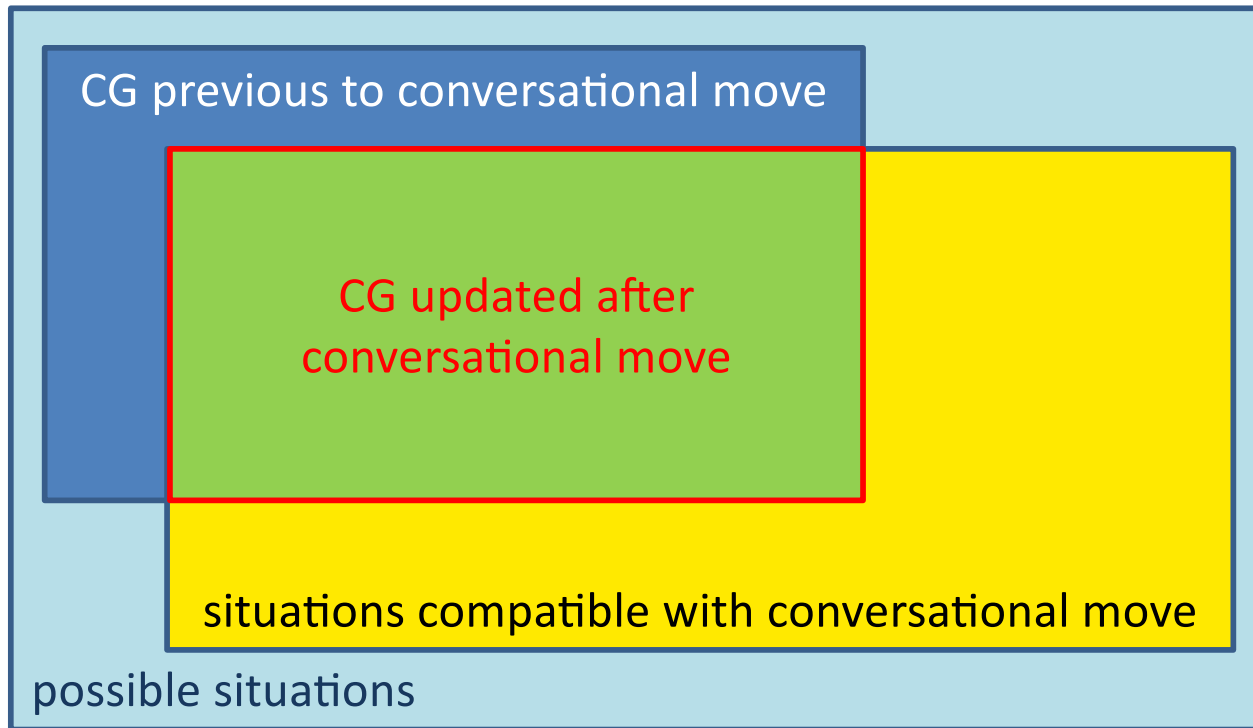17) *Julia **no** es alta **sino** (**pero) baja.* (Sp., Schwenter 2000:294)

'Julia is not tall but short.'

Interaction with scales: removal of quantity-based implicature:

18) *It is **not** cold, it's freezing*

Communicative functions and Common Ground

- Common Ground (CG): the set of situations that are compatible with the speakers' assumptions at a certain stage of information exchange

- **Two main communicative functions of negation strengthening:**

- (i) To express the speaker's **unconditional epistemic commitment** with respect to the addition of the new information conveyed by the negative assertion

- (ii) To **reject** the acceptance of a previous (discourse-old) assertion or implicit content into the Common Ground

Graphic adapted from Krifka 2005: http://amor.cms.hu-berlin.de/~h2816i3x/Lehre/2005_VL_Pragmatik/Pragmatik_10_Praesuppositionen.pdf

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Communicative functions

- At the DESCRIPTIVE level: strengthen the assertion by widening the involved quantificational domain or choosing the highest degree

- At the INTERACTIONAL level: strengthen the speaker's commitment to the assertability of a given utterance;

  - ✓ To signal that the utterance is not negotiable on the part of the speaker (intensifying adverbs)

  - ✓ To signal that what the interlocutor holds does not match the speaker's epistemic state (presuppositional negation – inherently contrastive reaction)

→ Connection with epistemic markers

→ Cumulative uses:

19) "Quel lavoro **non** aveva **assolutamente alcuna** finalità politica **né** tendeva a indottrinare gli studenti"

«That work did not have absolutely any political aim, nor was it trying to brainwash the students»

https://www.ilpost.it/2019/05/17/storia-insegnante-sospesa-palermo-slide-salvini/

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Diachronic role

Diachronic processes

"strengthening": fundamental ambiguity in diachronic work = **formal** strengthening or **interpretive** strengthening?

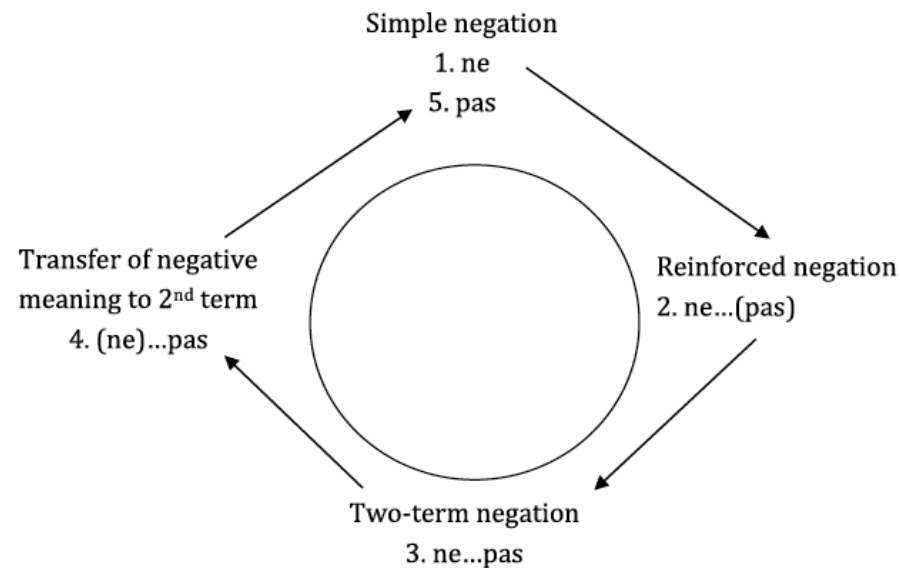Cf. discussion of **Jespersen's Cycle**

Fig. 1 The French Jespersen's cycle

Graphic: Labelle (2019)

Diachronic processes

Classical interpretation of **Jespersen's Cycle**:

Formal strengthening due to morpho-phonological *weakening* of the original negative marker (*ne > ne pas*) – *PULL-CHAIN SCENARIO*

vs.

Pragmatically based interpretation (Kiparsky & Condoravdi 2006; cf. already Meillet 1912, Schwegler 1990, Eckardt 2003, Schwenter 2006): constant competition between newer, more expressive forms and previously available forms, which eventually recede under the pragmatic pressure of the competitors; in turn, emphatic negation bleaches, due to inflationary effects (Dahl 2001)b – *PUSH-CHAIN SCENARIO*

→ Formal strengthening derives from pragmatic strengthening

Grammaticalization of negation strengtheners: indefinites

Cross-linguistically frequent: formal renewal of indefinite pronouns

nec unum *pro ea* ***verbum*** *contra fratrem responderunt*

not.even one:ACC for her:ABL word:ACC against brother:ACC answer:3PL

'they didn't answer even a word in her defense against the brother' (Aug. serm. 323.1)

Class. Lat. *nullus*

Late Lat. *nec unus*

Romance *nessuno* (It.), *ninguno* (Sp.), *nenhum* (Pt.), *neuns* (OF)

→ grammaticalization of correlative negation into a stand-alone focus particle that reinforces the indefinite via **scalar focus** (cf. Haspelmath 1997: 157-64; 222-26 for many cross-linguistic parallels)

→ parallel to Jespersen's Cycle in the nominal domain? (Gianollo 2018)

Grammaticalization of negation strengtheners: negative markers

Cross-linguistically frequent: formal renewal of negative marker

➤ Latin *non* from emphatically strengthened *noenum < *ne + unus* 'one'

➤ French *pas* from emphatic reinforcer to plain negative marker (through a doubling stage)

Weakening of contextual dependence (Visconti 2009, Larrivée 2016):

reaction to a conversational move (explicit utterance in context) **>**

reaction to a virtual contrast (hypothetical epistemic state) **>**

complete loss of presuppositionality

E.g. loss of presuppositional meaning with *mica* in some Northern Italian dialects (Pescarini 2006 for Veronese - Veneto, Ballarè 2018 for Vertovese - Lombardy)

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Grammaticalization properties

Interestingly, this process is a form of *semantic bleaching*

= in losing its presupposition-triggering function, *mica* loses its interactional nature (hence, its context dependence; cf. similar developments, such as additive > scalar focus particles; demonstrative > article)

→ Functional items connected to negation often appear to undergo counterdirectional developments wrt the grammaticalization cline objective > subjective > interpersonal (Traugott)
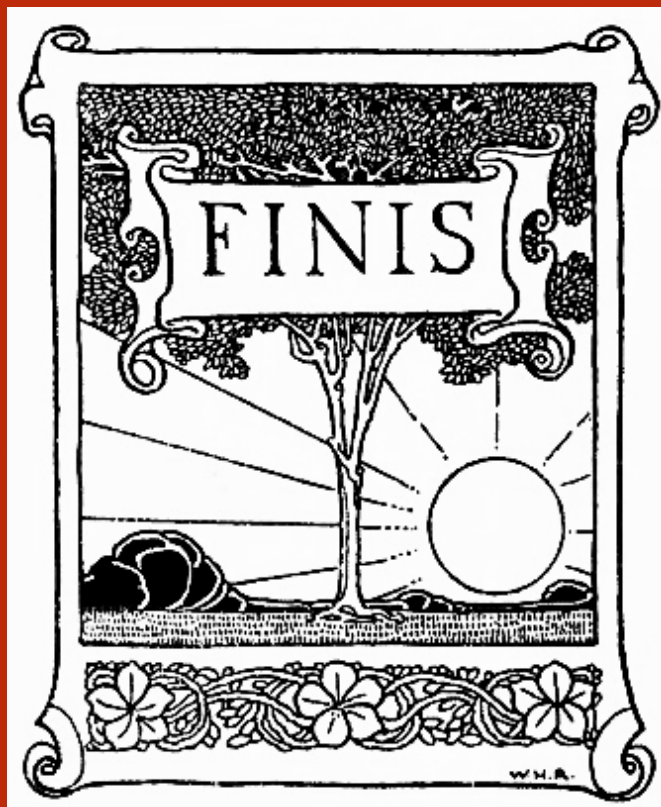
THANK YOU!

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