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S E M I N A R I O

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Language History needs Psychology:
the Case of Particles

MARTEDI' 11 APRILE 2006

ORE 10

AULA 6 PALAZZINA SEBI

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ABSTRACT

Discourse particles (*also, too, however, indeed, nonetheless, though*, etc.) are notoriously difficult to analyse from a semantic and pragmatic perspective. I will illustrate this with an analysis of the German particle "doch" that has both *adversative* and *confirmative* uses and can turn affirmative sentences into confirmation questions. One of the problems with discourse particles that is hard to capture in most

semantic/pragmatic theories is that they cannot normally be omitted from their natural occurrences in discourse and dialogue.

Where do particles come from? I will discuss a couple of histories and propose a statistical model of the grammaticalisation process that constructs both the particles themselves and new uses of the particles. It can be argued that the force behind their obligatory occurrence and the force that creates them are identical.

The account explains how particles might arise but it calls on an unexplained and empirically ungrounded: the harm that their absence would cause. I will conclude by presenting some work that points towards a possible psychological foundation and will speculate about what further results should be possible here.