Little Words
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Little Words: Their History, Phonology, Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics, and Acquisition.

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The Georgetown University Round Table of Languages and Linguistics (GURT) is an annual conference with a long-standing tradition—Georgetown University has hosted GURT since 1949. The conference began as a gathering for discussion of issues in all fields of language studies; over time it has developed into a nationally and internationally known forum for the in-depth treatment of special topics.

The 2007 Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics (GURT 2007) was cohosted by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Department of Linguistics and was held March 8–11. GURT 2007 focused on “little words”—items such as clitics, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, discourse particles, auxiliary/light verbs, prepositions, and so on—including their phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse function, historical development, variation, and acquisition (by children or adults). The plenary speakers, representing the broad scope of the theme of the conference, were Jonathan D. Bobaljik (University of Connecticut), Thomas Cravens (University of Wisconsin–Madison), Katherine Demuth (Brown University), Kai von Fintel (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and Claire Lefebvre (Université du Québec à Montréal). The conference drew more than two hundred attendees from local, national, and international institutions that included representatives from Asia, Europe, and Canada. There were seventy-four paper presentations, twelve poster presentations, and one colloquium.

To address the broad disciplinary scope of the conference’s focus on little words and provide a relatively balanced representation from the different areas of research disseminated during the conference, we had the difficult task of accepting only a small number of manuscripts for each research area from the many high-quality submissions we received. To this end, the following chapters address each of the six areas of research that were well presented and discussed during this event, which may be the first professional conference devoted to little words from a multidisciplinary perspective.

We are very grateful to the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (FLL), the Department of Linguistics, and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for financially supporting GURT 2007 and to all the reviewers who shared their expertise in helping us select a representative number of high-quality papers to be presented and published. We would also like to express our deepest appreciation to all the graduate students who assisted in one way or another to make this conference a success, especially Mika Hama, our graduate organizer who spent countless hours participating in the planning and implementation of many of the aspects of the conference, displaying her remarkable organizational abilities and sharing her magnetic enthusiasm while undertaking these heavy responsibilities. Finally, we would like to sincerely thank our colleague, Dr. Maite Camblor-Portilla, who not only served as our webmaster and GURT contact person throughout the conference but also assisted with the preparation of this volume.