

A semantics for interjective "what"
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I propose a compositional semantic analysis for "what" when appearing inter-sententially as in "You're giving a talk in, what, semantics?". I consider two main analyses described below:

Question account: Utterances with "what" are composed of an in-situ question followed by a best-guess answer.

Interjective account: An inter-sentential "what" functions as a planned interjective which conventionally implicates Speaker uncertainty.

After presenting the core descriptive and prosodic properties of utterances containing inter-sentential "what", I argue for the Interjective account, formalizing a focus-sensitive semantics for these expressions a la Rooth (1985) and Kratzer (1991), which can, in certain contexts, produce a pragmatic "halo" effect (Lasnik, 1999). I further illustrate how this approximative interpretation follows from what questions are currently under discussion within the discourse (Klein and von Stechow, 1989; Roberts, 1996; Buring, 2003) with examples from the Switchboard corpus (Godfrey et al, 1992).