

**Susan D FISCHER**

### **Borrowing of Interrogative Pronouns in American Sign Language**

In American Sign Language (ASL), a common way to borrow vocabulary from English is through fingerspelling, a letter-by-letter transliteration of English words. Some interrogative pronoun signs in ASL were derived from English fingerspelling, and then simplified in order to follow ASL phonotactics (Battison, 1978); for example, the two variants of the sign WHO are different simplifications of fingerspelling W-H-O. The sign WHY is probably also derived from fingerspelling W-H-Y in a particular location. Other ASL signs such as WHAT, HOW, and WHEN are apparently not related to fingerspelling. Alongside these lexical signs, however, are fingerspelled versions, W-H-A-T, H-O-W, and W-H-E-N, along with #WHAT, a shortened version of W-H-A-T. W-H-E-N has almost completely displaced the signed forms. The fingerspelled versions of WHAT and HOW, on the other hand have come to have meanings and syntactic distributions distinct from the signed versions. Just as fingerspelling is used elsewhere in ASL for for emphatic purposes, fingerspelled Wh-words are used both for emphasis and, in the case of W-H-A-T and #WHAT, incredulity. This kind of borrowing is thus an example of semantic split through borrowing.

#### **References**

Battison, Robbin (1978) *Lexical borrowing in American Sign Language*. Silver Spring, MD: Linstok Press.

#### **Workshop title**

Stability and Borrowability of Interrogative Pronominals

Susan D FISCHER susan.fischer@rit.edu